

NEWSLETTER  
FOR  
BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 7, No. 1

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FROM A TRAIN

By

K.S. JAVKUMAR

I remember the thrill of travelling by rail which I used to experience as a boy. The excitement of the bustle, of the changing scene outside the window, the new faces at the station, all excited my childish wonder and even today this thrill has not left me, though I have to make a conscious effort to arouse the susceptible mood. Of course now I am more aware of the smoke and dust and all the irksome discomforts with which people revile the railways; but then this awareness is not a gain - I simply recognise it as a sign of middle age insidiously creeping into my system. However I am lucky in that I can still switch on to the excitement of seeing the country outside and marvelling at the sights of nature. The world has not lost its wonders, and with increased knowledge I am all the more appreciative of the manifestations of nature's wondrous acts which, alas, are considered common-place and taken for granted by my fellow passengers. Thus they wilt visibly as the starch comes off their clothes and grime and dust settles in its place; while I find this inconsequential, for my mind is beyond it and out across the moving scene: the rich irrigated plots of lucern and wheat; stands of cotton, sugarcane and millet; broad grassy verges of stream beds, deeply eroded banks beyond; gnarled boughs of banyan and mangro; the flaming scarlet of *Butea* and coral; dense thickets of teacia; arabica; wind scorned boulders heaped high on grassy hill slopes; clouds over blue slopes of great mountains; ditches filled with water; village wells shaded by venerable peepals, swift eddies of hot wind swirling dry leaves into the sky; camels placidly browsing alongside the track; an elephant swaying at its tether; water buffaloes wallowing in deep mud - the rich and variegated scene of the Indian countryside which contains the richest bird life in the world. My mind conjures up birds among these varying settings and I almost feel that I am there below the banyans and mangroes, among the wheat and the grass along the stream, and I pity my co-travellers who feel only the heat and grime and the discomfort of being cooped up in a sweltering hot compartment. It is

at moments like this that I realise the value of all the happy hours spent pursuing this apparently valueless hobby.

Recently I invented a new game which makes each rail journey one of intense anticipation. I do actual birdwatching and not in imagination alone. The only drawback is that binoculars are of little use because of the train's movement and the short time a bird remains in view, but compensation is ample in the great area covered. In this manner, it is remarkable how many different species I have been able to see, and on a long journey, an idea of the cross-section of the birdlife of the country can be gained. The slower trains are an advantage in the greater opportunity they give to identify the bird. I have watched a pair of Sarus Cranes caring for their young; and another pair solicitously standing over an egg on a heaped nest of rushes; Pied Kingfishers hovering over a lily-choked lake near Hyderabad; Whiskered Terns skimming edges of a tidal mud near Bombay, Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters rising in hundreds one early September morning from an acacia in Marwar, solitary Kashmir Rollers buoyantly flying South on their autumn migration to Africa; teeming multitudes of Warblers, and Whitethroats flying from one clump to another in the same direction as the Rollers. I have noted Indian Rollers in display on a wayside station in Gujarat and watched a migration flight of White-eyed Buzzards. In Andhra, Orioles, Hoopoes and Drongoes are very common along the tracks while palm swifts are seen in association with Toddy palms. Storks of various types, and flocks of pelicans, are a thrill as the train crosses the flat half-submerged Thal area between Gujarat and Saurashtra and in this area I have seen numbers of Brown Shrikes, White-tailed Lapwings, Short-toed Larks and Marsh-Harriers. Flocks of Rose-ringed Parakeets flying across a pink evening sky is an eternal Indian scene while crossing rivers of North India; the noise of wheels on bridge girders sets off twittering flocks of Cliff Swallows nesting beneath. San Martins are more plentiful in North India than elsewhere, though strangely enough my railroad birdwatching has revealed Rajasthan and the Western Ganga plain as more favoured by Ring Doves and Little Brown Doves. In fact the most rewarding journeys in matter of seeing birds are through Rajasthan, across the Malwa plateau and the expanses of the Ganges plain. Strangely enough forest country seems poor for a railroad bird-watcher, possibly because visibility is cut down. Sound, of course, is not much value for this type of work and it is the eye which is most rewarding. At stations however one can hear bird calls and make a note of birdlife around while drinking scalding tea.

Sometimes a train stands outside the yard and here if the place is small, there is open country around. A stroll outside the compartment is refreshing and again one gets a better view of the birds. They are heard as well - the twittering of the Common Noddies and Purple Sunbirds, the warble of Bullfinches, the harsh chining of warblers, the jitter of Wren Warblers or the strident call of Drongoes chasing a Bay-bracketed shrike for a wriggling morsel. Coppermiths from a nearby tree are audible, so is the trr-trr-trr of a Redbreasted Flycatcher. A Great Grey Shrike sails down to grab a beetle at the front of the embankment, a Redwinged Bush Lark sits atop an Agave inflorescence sweetly singing away while a cocky Indian Robin hops close to appraise me with a shoe-button eye - the engine hoots and in the birdwatcher scrambles but not before seeing a Green Bee-eater snapping a dragonfly off a quivering reed in the ditch nearby. The train moves on and a paddy bird rises in startling white to land further into obscurity where a tall white egret stands erect and motionless, heedless of the chugging monster going by. The engine sends up great black puffs of smoke which are down on to the fields disturbing a trim kestrel which darts off to wheel high up above the pall - and so the birdwatcher happily continues his trip, loggined, parched a little, tired and cramped but happy, for the grime can be washed away, a cool glass of water will slake the thirst, a night's sleep will pass the time, but the things he saw will always be remembered,

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A list of birds seen from trains by the author:-

- |                               |                             |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Common House Crow.         | 2. Indian Jungle Crow.      |
| 3. Tree Pie.                  | 4. Gray Tit.                |
| 5. Jungle Babbler.            | 6. Large Grey Babbler.      |
| 7. Common Babbler.            | 8. Striated Babbler.        |
| 9. Red-vented Bulbul.         | 10. White-checked Bulbul.   |
| 11. Pied Bush chat.           | 12. Collared Bush chat.     |
| 13. Desert Wheatear.          | 14. Pied Wheatear.          |
| 15. Redstart.                 | 16. Indian Robin.           |
| 17. Blue Rock Thrush.         | 18. Redbreasted flycatcher. |
| 19. Great Grey Shrike.        | 20. Rufous-backed shrike.   |
| 21. Bay-backed shrike.        | 22. Black Drongo.           |
| 23. Indian Wren Warbler.      | 24. Golden Oriole.          |
| 25. Rosy Pastor.              | 26. Brahminy Mynah.         |
| 27. Common Mynah.             | 28. Bank Mynah.             |
| 29. Pied Mynah.               | 30. Faya.                   |
| 31. Whitethroated Munia.      | 32. House Sparrow.          |
| 33. Dusky Crdg Martin.        | 34. Common Swallow.         |
| 35. Red-rumped swallow.       | 36. Cliff swallow.          |
| 37. Wiretailed swallow.       | 38. Sand Martin.            |
| 39. White Wagtail.            | 40. Yellow Wagtail.         |
| 41. Yellowheaded Wagtail.     | 42. Pied Wagtail.           |
| 43. Tawny Pipit.              | 44. Crested Lark.           |
| 45. Short-toed Lark.          | 46. Red-winged Bush Lark.   |
| 47. Ashy-crowned Finch Lark.  | 48. Purple Sunbirds.        |
| 49. Copper-smith.             | 50. Green Parrot.           |
| 51. Koel.                     | 52. Crow Pheasant.          |
| 53. Foceringed Parakeet.      | 54. Alexandrine Parakeet.   |
| 55. Blossom-headed parakeet.  | 56. Indian Roller.          |
| 57. Kashmir Roller.           | 58. Green Tree-eater.       |
| 59. Blue-cheeked Bee-eater.   | 60. Pied Kingfisher.        |
| 61. Whitebreasted Kingfisher. | 62. Common Kingfisher.      |
| 63. Hoopoe.                   | 64. House Swift.            |
| 65. Palm Swift.               | 66. King Vulture.           |
| 67. Whitebacked Vulture.      | 68. Longbilled Vulture.     |
| 69. Scavenger Vulture.        | 70. Kestrel.                |
| 71. White-eyed Buzzard Eagle. | 72. Tawny Eagle.            |
| 73. Brahminy Eagle.           | 74. Common Pariah Kite.     |
| 75. Blackwinged Kite.         | 76. Marsh Harrier.          |
| 77. Pale Harrier.             | 78. Blue Rock Pigeon.       |
| 79. Red Turtle Dove.          | 80. Ring Dove.              |
| 81. Little Brown Dove.        | 82. Pouter.                 |
| 83. Grey Partridge.           | 84. Painted Partridge.      |
| 85. Black Partridge.          | 86. Pheasant-tailed Jacana. |
| 87. Sarus Cranes.             | 88. Stone Curlew.           |
| 89. Red-wattled Lapwing.      | 90. Yellow-wattled Lapwing. |
| 91. Whitetailed Lapwing.      | 92. Terns and Gulls.        |
| 93. Plovers.                  | 94. Sandpipers.             |
| 95. Black-winged Stilts.      | 96. Cormorants.             |
| 97. Pelicans.                 | 98. Storks.                 |
| 99. Herons and Egrets.        | 100. Bar-headed Geese.      |
| 101. Ducks.                   |                             |

By

Zafer Futehally

Kankeshwar is a 700 ft. high hill a few miles to the north of Alibag. It has a temple on top where there is a jatra every year, and to aid the march of pilgrims, steps of black stone have been beautifully laid right from the bottom to the top. Masons of olden days took their duties seriously, apparently, and the large heavy stones have been cut and laid with great care. Alas the banyan trees which formed an avenue on either side of the steps during my school days are now no more. Some tortured stems remain, a pitiful sight, and the few trees which have survived the vandal's axe will soon be laid low. The D.F.O. of Alibag with whom I regularly discuss the prospects of reforesting the hill-sides has given up hope of being able to deal effectively with illicit wood cutters, with the skeleton staff at his disposal. A few years ago a large number of cashew trees were planted. Cattle do not eat cashew nut trees, and if the human population had cooperated, we would have had a fine shaded hillside by now. But not a tree survives.

However, at the very top of Kankeshwar there is a lovely thick evergreen jungle, where in season the orange-red flowers of the Ashoke tree add a lustre to the place. In this forested patch the bird life is quite different from that just a few hundred yards away where the trees have gone, and where in consequence the temperature is much higher. On the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December we saw the Shama and heard it sing for a while. Spotted Rabblers were in great fever and called continuously from the ground, and from bushes and trees. On one small tree I saw a young Paradise Flycatcher, with chocolate tail streamers, a Magpie Robin, a Drongo, and a Redwhiskered Bulbul, very agitated. The fact that they were all peering at the same spot suggested the presence of a snake to which they presumably wanted to draw attention. Ioras and sunbirds also contributed to the chorus. It was altogether a delightful experience to be in such beautiful surroundings and in such good company.

The red berries of the banyan tree were now in great profusion and on one tree there must have been at least fifty Redwhiskered Bultuls feeding on them. I have never seen such a congregation of bulbuls on one tree. They were beside themselves with joy and life and sang simultaneously. There were no other birds apart from bulbuls on that tree.

Below Kankeshwar hill, there were Common Green Mac-eaters, Crested Larks, Blackbellied Finch Larks, Redbreasted Shallow, Dusky Crag Martins, and a Shikra, circling overhead. I have seen before, and must repeat, that this area of the Kolaba District is fascinating from the birdwatcher's point of view, and it is most encouraging that the area around Vihim, which is only a few miles away from Kankeshwar, is being permanently closed for shooting. (See, later and Comments.)

#### AVIAN TECHNOLOGY

By

C. Jashadri

(Reproduced from The Times of India)

Machines do not seem to have a monopoly in replacing human skill. In this age of computerised automation it may seem incredible that trained birds can supplant specialised workers. Yet the pigeon has graduated from a mail-carrier into a production line inspector.

An American transistor manufacturing firm has employed pigeons on its assembly line to control quality. A bird watches the conveyor belt carrying the assembled transistors, and if it spots a defective one, pecks at a lever, which actuates a mechanism for rejecting the faulty part. For its vigilance, it is rewarded with a grain of corn.

The pigeon can be trained in a variation of the Skinner Box (named after an American psychologist). This is a metal box with an observation panel and two levers. The bird learns to peck at a particular lever if the part is all right and at the other if the part is faulty.

The corn with which it is rewarded if it is correct is delivered through a hopper connected with the levers. If it is wrong, the lights go off for a time, temporarily blocking the opportunity to earn corn. This is punishment enough and the bird learns to avoid mistakes. The levers to be pecked at may be transparent to allow the bird to see through them at eye level.

Experiments have shown that the pigeon, with its very keen eyesight, can be used in the pharmaceutical industry too, for keeping watch over the production of pills, for instance. A perfect specimen of a pill, kept in a Skinner Box, helps the bird to spot faults.

(Pigeons are also doing the same job in Moscow with ball bearings. Each bird can inspect from 3000 to 4000 balls in an hour.)

#### REVIEW

BIRD PORTRAITURE. By C. F. Tunnicliffe. pp. 96. 1st ed. London and New York, 1945, The Studio.

I read this book only when I first began trying to draw birds and was confused with too much advice. Mr. Tunnicliffe's full and general treatment of bird sketching and painting, then, became a welcome stepping-stone from the purpose to the realities of amateur bird portraiture.

Such a stepping stone of course can only hope to succeed if it is as practical as the subject allows it to be. The advantage (or disadvantage) of bird painting is that several factors matter besides hard talent or imagination: correct observation, for instance, and a knowledge of the anatomy of birds; which is encouraging for us talentless aspirants.

Mr. Tunnicliffe begins with a chapter entitled 'Making a Beginning' in which he deals with bird anatomy and the drawing of stuffed birds, and then goes on to drawing from life. 'As a rule, unless the bird is asleep there is often quite lively movement... How then can we make drawings of the quick-moving bird? I know only one way, and that is to watch, and watch, and watch again. Do not attempt to draw while you have the bird in view, but try to get accurate impressions photographed in your mind, which you can set down on paper after the bird has disappeared.'

The next two chapters deal with field work and equipment. These early chapters are those necessary to a complete beginner. The author then moves into more ambitious fields -- plumage study in the different seasons and action studies, colour and tone, picture-making, and so on, which can support the reader's interest later on as his drawing improves or which can be very successfully helpful to a comparative veteran.

The style is pleasant and continuing, and several admiring exclamation marks expel a concentratedness in the writing. The author draws entirely on his ample supply of personal experiences and conclusions, and his own superb sketches and paintings (with which the book is filled) are a valuable supplement to the text.

Mr. Tunnicliffe is known in British natural history circles as the author of 'THE COUNTRY DOCK', now an 'established favourite', and as an expert ornithologist and bird artist. If his book reaches the inexperienced birdwatcher only to sketch new shapes quickly on the field, it is doing him an important service, for the ability should be valuable; even if the subject is not pursued as a major hobby.

From time to time we have been emphasising the importance of making individual field studies of our birds. It is good to learn that Mr. A. N. Prathapachandran has begun an ecological study of the House Crow in and around Bombay. At present it deals with daily and breeding behaviour -- it is hoped that it will be possible to extend it to economical aspects, interrelationship with other birds, and colonial behaviour. We will keep you informed about the progress of this work.

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Readers will be familiar with the general, and for us in India, inspiring Teesdale protest\* in Britain, the scale and intensity of which is 'quite unprecedented and arises from the feeling that much more is at stake than a single reservoir.' The incident well illustrates how important it is for conservation to go hand in hand with politics. While we are trying to create a public awareness of the need for conservation, it should be remembered that it should first take root with our government. Sustained efforts in this direction do bring results. Karnala was recently saved from being turned into an industrial area by the protests of the Bombay Natural History Society. As the network of what we call civilisation expands, there will be an increasing number of such cases and we cannot do too much along the lines of the 'Teesdale Defence'. We now learn that the Maharashtra Government is contemplating notifying Kihim\* and the surrounding area\*\*as completely closed for shooting, in view of the interesting bird life that exists here. This is another heartening example of Government responding to public (i.e. one man) pressure.

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We wish all our readers a very happy New Year, and request that the annual subscription of Rs/- be sent at your earliest convenience.

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## CORRESPONDENCE

Field Characteristics:

Upon reading J.N. McKelvie's note under the above-mentioned heading, in the November 1966 issue of the Newsletter, I felt impelled to hasten to the defence of Whistler and his grand book.

With regard to the colour of the dark markings on the underparts of the Ashycrowned Finch-Lark (Eremopterix grisea), although Salim Ali describes them in the 6th edition of THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS (p. 43) as being black, they are shown in the accompanying plate (Plate 22) as being very dark chocolate brown.

Stuart Baker in FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA, Birds, 2nd edition, Vol. 3, p. 354, describes the coloration of the parts in question as follows

'Lores, face, a broad supercilium to the nape, chin, throat, sides of neck, breast, abdomen and under tail coverts dark chocolate-brown, the hard parts practically black; ear-coverts and cheeks white mixed with fulvous; sides of body ash-grey mixed with dark brown; axillaries and under-wing coverts deep chocolate'.

Lt. Barnes in his HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF THE BOMBAY PRESIDENCY describes them thus: 'a deep brown or black band from the base of bill through the eyes, continued to the occiput; chin and throat, sides of neck (extending at right angles behind the ear coverts and thus taking the form of a cross), breast and lower parts deep chocolate-brown or black...'.

The truth may well be that the colour of these parts can be, as Barnes says, either deep chocolate-brown or black. The colour perhaps varies slightly as between the sexes or according to the age of the bird. In the field, of course, full allowance must be made for the false impression of colour which lights of different intensities and striking at different angles can give.

\*See last Newsletter.

\*\*See vol. 4 of current issue.

As to the scantiness of what Whistler has to say about the song of the Large Pied Wagtail, I can only say that he sins in good company, for I can find very little about the song of this bird. Stuart Baker, for example, in the FAUNA OF BRITISH INDIA, previously mentioned, is altogether innocent of any reference to its song.

S. K. Reeves  
Bookham, Surrey, England

\* \* \*

#### Behaviour of a Shama:

Last May we were in Tikerpare forest bungalow. One day while we were discussing the behaviour and nature of some common birds of W. Bengal and Orissa, Mr N. Batley (who has to look after the bamboo forest of Angul as a representative of Titagarh Paper Mills) informed me of a peculiar experience with a shama.

As we were keenly interested, he accompanied us next morning to Bagmunda forest about 15 miles from our camp at Tikerpare. The distance we covered in half an hour driving and got down from the car at a place where his people were cutting bamboos and making them ready for easy transport. Thereafter walking for a few minutes, Mr Batley started whistling in a very peculiar manner. The whistling was continued for a few minutes with regular intervals. All the time we were keenly watching the situation. As there was no response from any side we left that place. And started for the next spot. After about 1 km. distance he selected a place, where his people were engaged in stacking the cut pieces of bamboo.

There from the car itself, Mr. Batley started whistling with very long note and high pitch. He repeated the call thrice and then kept quiet. Within two or three minutes we heard a similar whistling from a very distant place. The from this end he replied and got the response. Mr. Batley asked me to help him; according to his instruction I started whistling in the same manner. From this end the whistle was a long note on a comparatively low pitch. Answering whistles came from the other end all the time. All of a sudden it stopped. We waited for about four minutes, then I located a place where only the tail of a bird was visible. Mr Batley, whistled in a very decent manner, then the bird changed its place. We heard a call; perhaps it was searching the source of whistling. I whistled very slowly and observed that it again changed the place. That bird was sitting in a place where we could see only its breast and nothing else. Next moment it flew away and after a minute came and sat on a branch without much leaves. Here we saw it clearly, the distance was only 16 metres.

H. P. Mukherjee & R. N. Mukherjee  
Zoological Survey of India

#### Meeting of "BIRDCATCHERS' FIELD CLUB OF INDIA"

The Annual General Meeting of the Birdcatchers' Field Club of India was held at the residence of Mr Zafar Futehally at Andheri, Bombay, on Saturday, the 17th December 1966, at 8.30 p.m.

There were a large number of people present; in fact larger than at any previous meeting. This was undoubtedly due to the attraction provided by the showing of Mr. P. P. Gee's films later on.

Dr Salim Ali was elected Chairman of the meeting.

The Honorary Secretary gave a brief report about the working of the Club. He said that the problem of getting suitable material for the Newsletter still persisted and appealed to members to send in notes on their observations, clippings from the press which could form the basis of articles, book reviews, and extracts from ornithological magazines.

In view of the difficulties of getting material one of the regional editors had suggested that it might be better to produce the Newsletter every two months. The Honorary Secretary felt however that most members



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S. K. Reeves  
Bookham, Surrey, England

in 1964

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H. P. Mukherjee & R.N. Mukherjee  
Zoological Survey of India

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The Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India was held at the residence of Mr Zafar Futehally at Andheri, Bombay, on Saturday, the 17th December 1966, at 5.30 p.m.

There were a large number of people present; in fact larger than at any previous meeting. This was undoubtedly due to the attraction provided by the showing of Mr. E. P. Gee's films later on.

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In view of the difficulties of getting material one of the regional editors had suggested that it might be better to produce the Newsletter every two months. The Honorary Secretary felt however that most members would prefer to get the Newsletter every month, and this feeling was endorsed by the meeting.

Regarding accounts, the Honorary Secretary said that the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India had to be grateful to Dynacraft Machine Co. Pvt. Ltd. for absorbing most of the expenditure in connection with the production of the Newsletter.

While this situation continued, the subscription rate would remain Rs 5/-. Persons in a position to donate more were requested to do so. (It may be mentioned that a handsome donation of Rs 100/- was received from one of the regional editors immediately after the meeting.)

It was unanimously decided that the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India would become a member of the International Council for Bird Preservation and a Friend of the International Council for Conservation of Nature.

It was unanimously decided that the present office bearers would continue in office for another year.

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

After the meeting Mr E. P. Gee who was present showed his excellent films on elephants, orchids, Manas sanctuary, and Kaziranga Sanctuary, which were greatly appreciated.

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Zafar Putehally  
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers  
32-A Juhu Lane  
Andheri, Bombay 58-AS

# NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 7—No. 2—1967 February



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BIRDS OF DARJEELING

By

E.D. AVARI

Any resemblance between what follows and to that of a scientific paper is entirely fictitious. A psychological dread of appearing in print has enabled me to live happily, alas, until the letter arrived from the Editor of the NEWSLETTER, ... "a long article/short article/review/letter, etc..." To cap this, a nightmare scene followed, (after several years of a guilt-ridden existence), in which the Editor stood over my bed waving a large sword, threatening immediate decapitation, unless something appeared in the February issue! I still shudder as I frantically type this after a hurried consultation of my moth-eaten notes.

Never let it be said that the writer (oh! wonderful word), ever had or will have any pretensions of being anything but one who has been interested in forests, shikar, and all the treasures thereof. Most of my notes are therefore necessarily confined to animals & measurements, and odd thrilling encounters which occur once in a blue-moon, and are then generally talked about every week or so by 'intrepid' shikaris!

I can already hear the groans of all the protectors of wild life, so let me tell my story: During the past three decades it has been my poor fortune to have trudged, hiked, and bivouacked throughout the Darjeeling District, most of Nepal, all of Sikkim, and parts of Bhutan. Two trips into Tibet during my schooldays also come to mind. By and large I have found that the bird life of the hill areas is common to Bhutan, Sikkim, Nepal & this District. Starting from the belt of Terai

which spreads its dense tropical foliage throughout the base of the four regions mentioned above, in similar Savannah-like riverain forests, are found the Lapwings, Ibisbills, Nightjars, Herons, Mergansers, (Goosanders), Fairy Bluebirds, both species of the Himalayan Hornbills, the Great & the Lesser, the Doves including the flashy Emerald, the Spotted, and the Rufous Turtle, not to speak of the ubiquitous Red Jungle Fowl, the Peafowl, Snipe, Partridge etc. and of course the delightful Koklas and Pin Tail Greeners. The bartailed Cuckoo-Dove can be heard throughout the plains, and its rather mournful cry, together with the call of the Green Pigeon from a Silk Cotton tree, is one of the lasting memories of the jungles. Among the myriads of bird calls, one can never forget the call of the Forest Eagle Owl. While sitting in a machan awaiting a man-eater, over a rather spooky-looking corpse of an elderly Brahman, one's imagination tends to run riot, especially in a youngster barely 17. A horrible cry rather like that of a mad woman being strangled to death emanated from a tree nearby, at about 10 p.m. resulting in considerable alarm and despondency, and one was very sorely tempted to leap out of the machan and leg it for camp as fast as one's legs could go. Only the worse thought of the man-eater licking its chops below, prevented this course, and for the next hour or so, the tree shook with the trembling of the intrepid shikari. Many moons later it transpired that the call originated from this devilish bird, and much laughter ensued around the camp-fire when the story was told.

The Lower Forests from about 1000 to 3000 feet above sea level have most of the birds mentioned above, with some startlingly beautiful minivets, including the short-billed (*Pericrocotus brevirostris*) and the flamboyant Scarlet (*P. speciosus*) which liven the green foliage with the scarlet and beautiful yellow plumage of the males and females, and on one occasion a family of Minivets and another of Fairy Bluebirds (*Irena puella sikkimensis*) caused an unscheduled halt for a band of 200 men on a route march for some ten minutes or so, while the lovely birds entertained. Another memorable halt which nearly resulted in a stampede, occurred when a party of men on manoeuvres, expecting an enemy ambush, suddenly heard a trio of Great Hornbills (*Bucconus bicornis* L.) take off from the top of the tree beneath which they had paused. The whooshing of wings, the raucous calls, all adding up to the mounting tension, caused much pent up thoughts to be released in limits of laughter. I have often wondered why this magnificent bird was not named the National Bird of India. It has many of the habits of our countrymen, is averse to strong drink, but indulges in picking fermented berries occasionally and gets hilariously drunk, while still trying to maintain a ridiculously funny poise; the womenfolk are locked up at home, while the solitary males club together for a chat, and at the last moment remember to collect delicacies for the old lady and the newly arrived youngsters. They hate meat, but occasionally little harm to themselves, and have also been observed trying to surreptitiously make a meal of some strictly non-vegetarian diet. My innocent suggestion to this effect at a Wild Life Board meeting was rather rudely turned down by an irate White-bellied Upstart (*Chalcophaps indica* leucoccephalus *congregata*). Be that as it may there is no denying that the Great Himalayan Hornbill, (surely the largest of the species) is a magnificent bird deserving every protection. Unfortunately all the rarer species of animals and birds are much sought after by various tribes and others for their supposedly medicinal properties. This bird is reputed to yield an oil from its beak, (a process known to but a handful), which has the magical property of penetrating through to the joints; invaluable for gouty and rheumatic patients. Since nobody can extract the oil in the correct manner, the quack thrives on the illegitimate slaughter of these innocents.

No account of the forests mentioned above would be complete without mention of the brilliant gem of a Three-toed Kingfisher (Ceyx orithaca?), flashing over the mountain streams and glittering like a blue and lilac diamond.

The Middle Hill Forests between 5000 to 6000 feet abound in trees of the oak, chestnut, cherry, maple, birch, and alder groups, a veritable paradise for birds. Orioles, especially the Golden and the Black-headed (Oriolus oriolus L.) and (Oriolus chinensis) congregate together with the fascinating Trongo clan of these forests, such as the bellicose Racket Tailed (Dicrurus remifer tectirostris), the truly named Hattentot or Hair Crested, the steel grey (Dicrurus leucophaeus hopwoodi), and a beautiful black little one which has a metallic bronze sheen of greenish blue in the sun, (which, imitated my whistle while I called my dog), in company with the Calocitta hardwickii, and Bluebearded Bee-eaters (Nyctyornis a. athertoni) the latter being common around Sukma (altitude about 800 feet). The Blue Jay (Purystomus orientalis cyanicollis) on New Year's day 1967 gave a spectacular display of aerobatics on the banks of the Rugneet which never separates this District from Sikkim. On another occasion I have seen this oxford Cambridge type hurtling through the air, and catching insects on the wing, then flying straight into its lair in a hole at the top of a very high tree, on the banks of the Mechi just on the Nepal border.

The Upper Hill forests between 6000 to 8000 feet, comprise of much of the lower types, together with the coniferous and rhododendrons, Oaks with parasitic mistletoes, beeches, alnus (locally called Utis), and the Bamboos, varieties of them, with the beautiful Magnolias, including the regal Campbellii, provide much interesting substance for man and bird alike, but alas much of the forests are being destroyed in and around Darjeeling, to make room for man, and the mammals and birds have suffered, as time alone will testify.

Around Darjeeling the Black-headed Sibia (Heterophasia capistrata bayleyi), the Greenbacked Tit (Parus monticolus .), the Strongfooted Bush Warbler (Geothlypis fortipes .) (seldom seen but always heard), and the Teiethrix or Pekin Robin (Teiethrix lutea calipyga) are among the most vociferous during the different seasons. I heard the first Sibia yesterday and January 1967 at Jalapahar (Darjeeling) altitude 7500. It was an experimental call, and after tentatively calling twice, weakly, it decided to wait for the proper time, about a month hence. The Fortipes is a menace in the vicinity of Darjeeling with its wail calls, and many a plains visitor of the fairer sex is fooled into thinking that she has merited the attention of some hill Romeo.

Darjeeling of course is a veritable meeting place for birds throughout the year. Outposts in the hands of skilled urchins and other modern educated youths have taken their toll, not so much in casualties but certainly by disturbing their nesting and migration. We are not a very conservation minded race as a rule, and all one can do is to confiscate the offending weapon. To take a person such as this to the police would result in upraised eyebrows, and one would be made to look like the village idiot for daring to arrest one who has merely hurled stones at birds, while there are so many other important things to think about. The Verditer, The Hillava and the Himalayan Whistling Thrush are quite commonly met with along the less frequented walks skirting the town. In Gangtok I found almost the same type of birds present, except that I came across more Leaf Warblers than I have seen here. Regarding Woodcock I still squirm in embarrassment when I think of the joyous announcement I made one evening in 1947 to a band of fellow hunters after a successful shoot at Takdah, about 10 miles from Darjeeling, at an elevation of about 5000 feet, where we had shot several woodcock and Kalej together with some muntjac, and pig. I said that I had seen a woodcock fly with a young one clasped between its legs! At least it certainly looked like that to me being clearly outlined

against the sky. Howls of derision and laughter greeted this remark. While some books mention this as a possibility, which I came to know later, I wonder if there was some optical illusion after all, for I have never since seen anything like it again.

In the Alpine and Tibet Alpine regions ranging from 9000 to 11000, and 12000 to 18000 feet respectively, the most common birds one comes across are the famous Hodgson's Grandals, flocks of which have been seen at Singalila, 12,000 ft. (Darjeeling), Thimpu (Bhutan) 9,000 ft., Nathang (Sikkim), Lampheram (Nepal) 11,000 ft., Thangu (Sikkim) 13,500 ft., Nethula (Sikkim) 14,200 ft. and other high places which are now forgotten in the mists of time. I always remember the beauty of these birds, and my notes say "remarkably silent fliers adding to the eeriness of a still afternoon before a snowstorm". Again "it would seem that the male population have taken a holiday from their nagging wives, all the birds seem to be males, very few of the browner females being at all in evidence". This was near Gyagong (Sikkim) about 15,500 feet. In the Gurudongma area near a very large lake, north of Kanchenjunga (not to be confused with Kanchendzonga), I saw and shot at a straggling wild goose flying in a northerly direction, in November 1954, with a .22 Rifle. It took the bullet with an almost metallic clang which pulled him up in midair for a moment, then carried on as if nothing had happened. It wasn't till he got to the end of the lake that he suddenly dropped like a stone. When I got to him a half hour later, fully a mile away, I found that the .22 bullet had taken him through the chest, through a protective layer of hard ice fully one inch thick. Was it a wandering Farhead?? I cannot remember.

In the Dungkya La area in 1938, I saw large flocks of the Red Billed Chough, which I have also seen at the Nathu La Pass, Jelep La, Lipup, Singalila Range, and at Phari Dzong (Tibet), where I tried a colour photo, which did not satisfy, as the colour of the blue sky appears black as is wont to do on snaps taken at high altitudes, and the birds are not to be seen!

The yellow billed Chough is not so well equipped for flying at even higher altitudes than its red billed cousin, but both varieties are a treat to watch since they keep themselves amused all day with their aerial antics, in these uninhabited dreary places.

The Hammerhead or Bearded Vulture (*Accipiter barbatus* L.) does not look like a vulture at all to me, but rather like an aristocratic member of the Eagle family. A truly noble-looking bird which once took a small puppy from a Phamra nomad tent (on the way to Chubithang) (Tibet), before dropping it from a height of about 40 feet. It later alighted near the rear of its prize, and walked up to the corpse just like an eagle, seized the pup and took off like a fighter plane. I must say it scared the wits out of me one morning when a particularly large specimen dived past my head with the noise of a young aircraft at high speed.

Among my best friends in the bird world can be counted the fearless little Sikkim Black Tit (*Parus rubicinctus beavani*), which kept up its cheerful little song, rather like the common Darjeeling Green backed tit, throughout a fearful thunderstorm, with lightning striking the neighbouring Silver Pine and Junipers accompanied by the most awesome thunder only heard at the heights of Sandakphu and Phalung (Bhutan), (the trijunction of Nepal, Sikkim and Darjeeling) at about 11,000 feet. While I stood cowering before this display of Nature's wrath the little fellow called away merrily, "whiwhi, whiwhi, whiwhi, whiwhi, as if telling me not to worry! How ever little humans would have probably died of heart failure at the spot, as I was nearly did during that frightful experience which lasted over an hour.

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The Brown and White Snow Pigeon (Columba leuconota leuconota), and The Snowcock (Tetraogallus tibetanus aquilonifer) are commonly met with all around the heights of Gyagong (Sikkim), Pepethang (Tibet), etc. The latter bird together with the Blood Pheasant (Ithaginis cruentus affinis) should be prepared by a good Lepcha cook, who knows how to remove the high gamey smell usually associated with these birds; rather like removing the musk pods from a musk deer and not allowing it to come into contact with the flesh, after which they make good eating.

The Crimson-horned Tragopan (Tragopan satyra) is called the Monal in Nepal, curiously, and the real Monal, the majestic Impeyan Pheasant (Lophophorus impeianus), is called the Dafay, (pronounced very nasally). Unfortunately these birds are being wiped out ruthlessly all over, as they are very stupid and give their positions away, sometimes not even daring to run. Both make excellent birds for the table, but will fast disappear from the face of the earth.

There are so many things one could write about reminiscently, but I fear that I have made this into what the Editor would term a Long/ letter, and I must say in conclusion that I strongly feel that for a person who is genuinely interested in birds there are very few places like our environments here in the whole wide world, where one can at once observe wild life from an altitude of a few hundred feet to many thousands of feet within such a short time, and with comparatively little effort, watch a fast changing panorama of Nature in full glory unrolling herself before one's fascinated gaze.

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#### RANDOM OBSERVATIONS

By

S. V. Nilakanta

This winter I am a little disappointed because I have taken for granted that the little Blyth's Reed Warbler ringed by me on 20 February 1964, is bound to return without fail. It has not done so. Actually, two of these birds were banded on that day and one of them has been returning to this place for the last two winter seasons. Since I did not succeed in catching this bird a second time, I am unable to say whether it bore the number A-45101 or A-45102. Another Blyth's Reed Warbler has now taken its place. This territory of less than a thousand square yards is probably too small to accommodate more than one or two of these birds, though just before their northward journey, I have seen five of them chasing each other.

A few weeks back there was some excitement in front of our gate near the hedge. A Rufous-backed Shrike, which often comes here in the dry season, had caught and just killed a garden lizard. This lizard appeared to be about eight inches in length from head to tip of tail. Even after death, the body of this lizard was struggling and the bird had to batter it considerably to quieten it. A very large garden lizard which was much heavier than the shrike, saw this and ran across the road towards this struggle. The shrike immediately picked up its prey and flew up to the wooden framework, half way up our gate. Great difficulty was experienced by the bird in carrying such a heavy and unwieldy weight. The shrike held the neck of the lizard in its powerful beak. The trailing body of the lizard was held by the feet of the bird. The large garden lizard paused a few seconds to get its bearings and after rolling its eyes, once again streaked across the ground in pursuit of the bird. This time, the shrike was better prepared for flight and took off with the prey held in the same way as mentioned. The bird flew away to the back of the house safe enough in distance to prevent further pursuit. This flight was also very laboured, the bird not being able to rise more than two feet from the ground.

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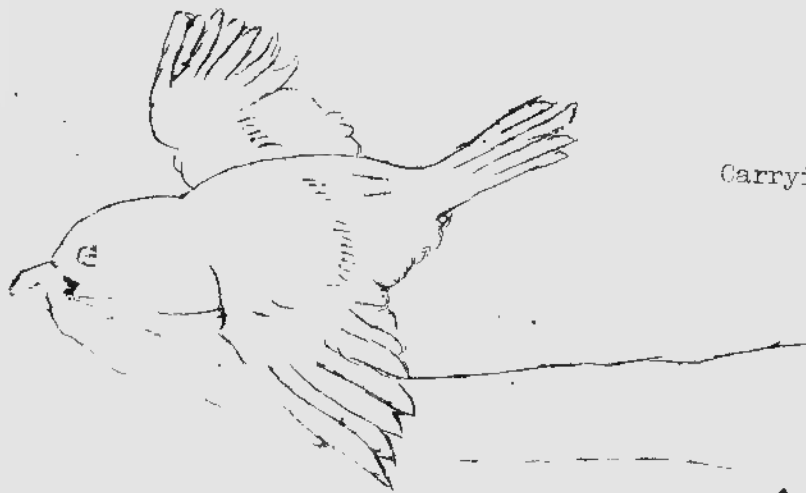
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This incident reminded me of another one. In February 1962 issue of the Newsletter Mr Janakiraman had mentioned the carrying of sticks 'held in its legs' by a babbler. This observation was further queried by Dr Salim Ali in the next issue. Even as I watched the shrike, I was aware of this controversy and was all the keener to make my observation as accurately as possible.

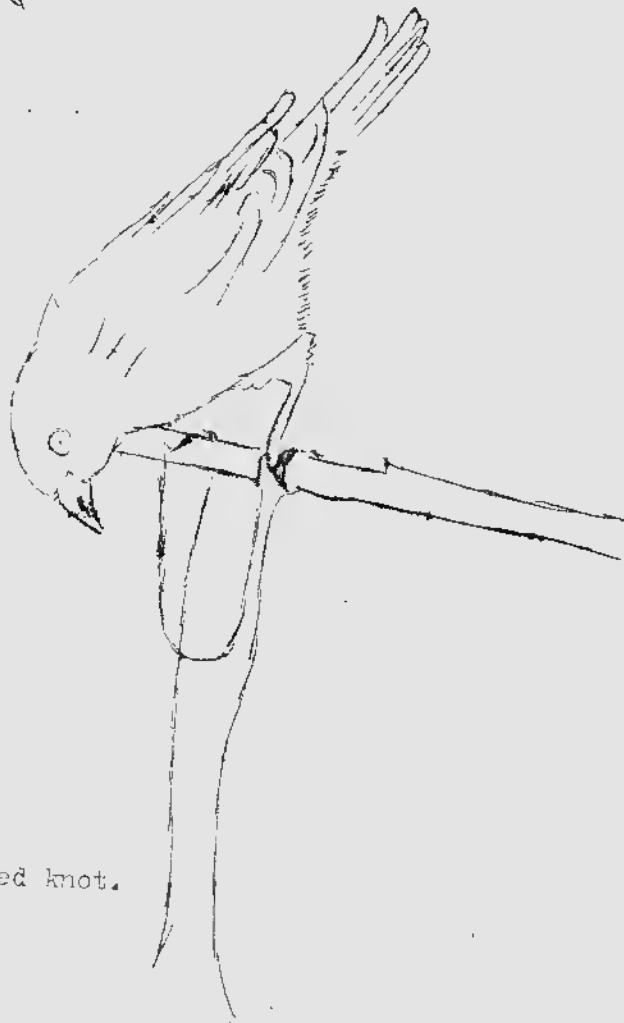
In the first week of October I went to Hyderabad. There were a few swallows skimming close to the water at a pond near Begumpet airfield. I had not noticed any swallows so early in the vicinity of Bombay. Last year, at the end of September, I went from Hyderabad to Vishakapatnam by train. There was nothing to do but watch birds during that tedious journey. Again there were vast numbers of swallows, although I had not noticed any in Bombay. Perhaps Bombay birds and Andhra birds have different summer homes.

In Hyderabad I met Mr Jamshed Vatcha who stays in a heavily wooded estate in Golconda. He described how weaver birds and sun birds tie the first knot in building their suspended nests. The string is caught hold of at its point of balance as shown in the sketch. The bird

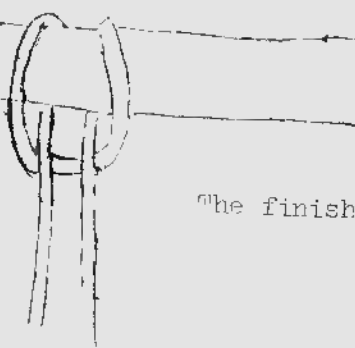


Carrying the material.

Preparing to bring  
free ends through  
loop.



The finished knot.



carries the string as shown. The string is then placed over the supporting twig as shown in the second sketch. The loop hangs over one side of the twig and the free ends hang over on the other side. The bird now sits on the string so that the string may not slip down. The next operation is to bend down and get hold of the free ends. The bird passes its bill and part of its head if necessary through the loop to get hold of the free ends. The latter are now drawn through the loop to make the knot as shown in the last sketch.

Mr Jamshed Vatcha did not tell me how the bird proceeds further with the construction of its nest but he did tell me that a sun bird once built on his clothes line after its first nest was accidentally destroyed. Most of the material was quickly retrieved from the first nest to build the next.

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REVIEW

BIRDS IN OUR LIVES. By Alfred Steffernd, Ed., Arnold L. Nelson, Managing Editor, Bob Hines, Artist. Bureau of Sport, Fisheries and Wildlife.

The U. S. Dept. of the Interior, which I take to be the equivalent of our Home Ministry, has performed an extremely imaginative task in bringing out this large (over 550 pages) volume on Birds, produced with customary American lavishness. The book is different from most bird books because it is written at so many different levels -- from the frankly sentimental to the carefully scientific. There are chapters on 'Sunday at the Zoo', 'Falconry', 'Birds in the Bible', and 'Birds on Stamps'. At the other end there is an article by E. Mayr on Birds and Science, and another by Roger Tory Peterson. Still the real purpose of the book is revealed in the last four sections, which, beginning with an article on Birds and Pesticides, goes on to several fine articles by conservationists, and finally to describe in detail the game laws and the work done by the Bureau of Sport, Fisheries and Wildlife. Indeed the last 250 pages of this book could be reprinted as a separate volume. It makes a first rate book on conservation in general, and indicates the trend of thinking on the subject in the U. S. with a description of the work being done there. It could be a document which might inspire the governments of other countries, notably India, to emulate the attitudes of the U. S. Government in this respect.

L. F.

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

E. D. Avari who was 'sacked' from our Editorial Board for not sending in a single contribution during his tenure of office has made handsome amends by his article published in this issue. All political shades of birdwatchers will enjoy his reference to Chaimarrornis leucocephalus Congressii, and we hope we will have more articles from his pen in the future. For most of us the birds of Darjeeling can only be enjoyed vicariously.

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The Newsletter has in the past 'lifted' articles from other nature magazines when original material has been lacking with the permission of course of the publishers. In our November 1966 issue however the article on Anting was reproduced from an issue of The Countryman of 1958 inadvertently without prior permission. As will be seen from the correspondence section the rebuke from its Chairman has been couched in remarkably gentle terms but it has gone home all right. Incidentally some of our readers may want to subscribe to The Countryman which is a fine magazine.

'A Rebuke'

The Editor of THE COUNTRYMAN has drawn my attention to the fact that in the November issue of your 'Newsletter For Birdwatchers' you have used an article lifted completely from the Winter 1958 issue of THE COUNTRYMAN.

He points out that in view of the nature of your publication, he would certainly have been willing to give permission had he been asked, but he would have asked you to include the address of our magazine so that interested readers could write for a copy if they wanted to do so.

Perhaps in future if such an occasion arises you will write to him, he is:

Mr John Cripps,  
The Editor,  
The Countryman Limited,  
Burford, Oxford,  
England.

Yours sincerely

Sd. N. A. Whinfrey  
(CHAIRMAN)

The Countryman

10 Bouverie Street, London E. C. 4

Dated 17 January 1967

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Birdwatching at Periyar, Kerala

On a recent trip to some game sanctuaries in the south, my wife and I spent parts of three days (October 30 through November 1) birdwatching at Periyar. Although we found Periyar less suited to birdwatching than Bandipur and Mudumalai, in our time there we did see members of sixty-odd species well enough to be sure of what species they belonged to. Seven of these species are not definitely recorded in the five notes about Periyar and the area around it that you have published since June 1964. These seven species are:

1. Pied Flycatcher-shrike
2. Rufoustailed Flycatcher
3. Magpie Robin
4. Whitebacked Munia
5. Osprey
6. Median Egret
7. Indian Blackcrested Baza.

Louis Werner

Fear Panth Nibas, Bhubaneswar 2  
Orissa

January 4, 1967

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"Bird Books"

"Bird Books" by R. R. A. Stewart Melliush in December issue of The Newsletter for Birdwatchers was really a very fine review of some of the reference literature available and forthcoming on the Birds of our Country. I congratulate him for this. Such articles will be very useful for persons whose acquaintance with ornithology is not of longstanding and who propose to take a keen interest on the subject.

I would like to add one more Book to his list i.e. The Books of Southern India by H.B. Baker and G.H. Inglis. This Book was published by the Government of Madras during 1930 and costs Rs.15/= per copy.

I understand that copies are still available and those interested can have it from the Superintendent Govt. Press, Madras at a reduced rate of Rs.10/= per copy.

Another useful Book in a regional language for persons interested in Bird watching is Birds of Kerala by K.V. Geelakantan (Malayalam). This costs Rs.8=50 and was published by Kerala Sahithya Akademy, Trichur

K. Manu Nair  
Forest Ranger  
Kulamavu Post  
(via) Thodupuzha,  
KERALA STATE.

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Zafar Rutehally  
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers  
32-A Juhu Lane,  
Andheri, Bombay 58-AS.

# NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 7—No. 3—1967 March





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A VISIT TO KANHA NATIONAL PARK

By

Jasper Newsome

In the last week of January this year my friend Christopher Petyt and I visited Kanha National Park in the Mandla district of Madhya Pradesh. We spent five days in the park during which time we were able to see quite a good number of bird species, although we had less luck with the mammals which are the main attraction of the park, failing altogether to see either tiger, gaur, and blue bull. At night we heard tigers roaring close to the Forest Rest House, and often in daylight whilst walking along the forest-tracks we came across fresh footprints. Deer, however, we saw many of, though the great bulk were spotted deer, but we did see rare parties of both swamp deer and barking deer.

The habitat at Kanha is mostly sal (*Shorea robusta*) jungle, for the most part quite well grown with a good canopy for feeding parties of birds to forage in. The undergrowth is mostly bamboo. There are open spaces (or maidans) at several places in the park, primarily around the Forest Rest Houses at Kanha and Kisli. There are also tanks sheltering waterfowl and waders. Thus although the greater area of Kanha is thick forest nonetheless there is a diversity of habitat such that a few days there will produce a sizable and varied list of birds. I do not propose in this short article to include all the birds we saw, nearly one hundred species in all, but merely those less familiar species that we found more interesting than most, whilst at the same time giving an idea of the diversity of genera that make up the avifauna of the area.

First I should like to deal with the birds of the forest proper, since these are more worthy of mention in this habitat than elsewhere. For the most part we came across these forest species in mixed feeding parties of invariably one dozen species or more, woodpeckers, drongos, flycatchers, warblers, tits, all feeding according to their specific habit, yet also cooperating. A typical party that I have described in my field note-book consisted in the following species: feeding up the trunks of the trees were the small Scaly Bellied Green Woodpecker (*Picus xanthopygaeus*), two nuthatches, the Velvetfronted and the Chestnutbellied (*Sitta frontalis* and *castanea*); on a convenient perch from where it often launched into the air in pursuit of insects

disturbed by the trunk-feeders sat a Whitebellied Drongo (Dicrurus caerulescens) whilst amongst the upper branches of the trees Grey Tits (Parus major) and Yellowcheeked Tits (Parus xanthogenys) foraged about, acrobatically gleening the undersides of the leaves for any creeping food they might be harbouring. In the same way Ioras (Aegithina tiphia) fed, whilst the very topmost part of the canopy seemed the province of the minutest Phylloscopi warblers, that very difficult genus of drab olivaceous birds that confounds most amateur birdwatchers. We saw very many of these birds, we watched them until our necks ached, and made many descriptions; noting the presence or absence of one or two bars on the wing, the colour and extent of the supercilium, whether or not the birds had coronal bands, what their calls were.... in spite of my partiality to this genus and a decade of watching them, several birds stumped me completely, but we were able to positively identify three species. The commonest was the Chiffchaff (Ph. collybita), which has no wing-bars, no coronal stripe and a fainter supercilium than the majority of the genus. Usually the chiffchaff has black legs, though this character is unreliable as often in winter the legs are pale, an often quoted characteristic of the very similar Willow Warbler (Ph. trochilus), a much rarer bird in India than the Chiffchaff. The next most numerous species was apparently the Dull Green Leaf Warbler (Ph. trochiloides), a species with a single wing-bar and a clear, creamy supercilium, no coronal markings, rump uniform with back-colour and having no white on the sides of the tail as some species of this genus do. This Dull Green species is inseparable in the field, essentially, from another species, the Largebilled Leaf Warbler (Ph. magnirostris) were it not for the great difference in calls. Whilst trochiloides has a typical, single call-note sooeet, magnirostris has a distinctive double chir-chee call note; on the evidence of this call note along we saw only one definite magnirostris, that was on our first day at Kanha. The bird was moving about the upper branches of a good sized sal in open woodland, not in any feeding party or closely associating with other birds though there was a flycatcher in the same tree that we could not identify immediately. This flycatcher was olive-brown above, a darker, browner shade toward the tail which was itself almost rufous. The bird had a clear buff eye-stripe and white throat patch.

A letter-bounded below by an dark green, almost black. call note I described at the time as 'a whistle and jarr'. My tentative identification is Muscicapa monileger, the Whitegorgetted Flycatcher, I say tentative since it was far beyond the range given for this species in Dillon Ripley's SYNOPSIS, but there is little definite information on the status of this rare bird.

We were given a trying time by several species of flycatcher, so much so in two cases that I had finally to abandon the attempt to fix their identity. The commonest occurring species was the Redbreasted Flycatcher (M. parva) which we saw almost everywhere on the forest edges and in clearings. This species has a very individual 'jizz'-- those characteristics especially behavioural that a bird may be unfailingly recognized by. Very often words fail one when attempting to describe the 'jizz' of some species, but not so that of the Redbreasted Flycatcher: this species is given to low perches and frequent descents to the ground, tail-flicking (that highlights the white base to the tail) and the tic tic tic call note. Another flycatcher we were fortunate to meet with was the Little Blue and White Flycatcher (M. superciliaris). We met this bird on the longest sustained walk that we made, a walk through all the biotopes of the area, covering over a dozen miles and clocking up many species like this flycatcher that we were not to see again. Or as I should say, not to identify subsequently: we saw a confusing multiplicity of male and female flycatchers that we found hopelessly unmanageable.

This is a poor confession coming from a pair of keen and fairly competent British ornithologists, who at home are accustomed to missing nothing, immature, female or otherwise; but our avifauna is neither as varied nor quite so confusing as that of India.) The Little Blue and White Flycatcher is a cobalt-blue above and white below with a black smudge on either side of the breast and a white eye stripe that is variable in size and shape. The bird we saw had a small white stripe above and before the eye. Another

blue above was entirely black but for white supercilium-(distinct and well formed), white at the base of tail (as latter) and with some white on the wing. The underparts of this species were quite white, lacking any markings. The same hour I saw and described a diminutive female flycatcher that at the time I fancied was the female of this same species since it had similar patterning but was olivaceous above apart from a brown tail. What made me feel acutely that it was the female of the same species was its warbler-like feeding habits, rather than the usual perching and swooping habit of most flycatchers. These birds were Little Pied Flycatchers (M. westermanni), like scaled-down Pied Flycatchers (M. hypoleuca) that are familiar birds of a European summer. The final (definitely identifiable) species of flycatcher that we are able to record from Kanha was the small, drab Brown Flycatcher (M. latirostris) that we saw several times, usually around the Forest Rest Houses where they fed much more like chats than flycatchers, flying to the ground after crawling prey, much as the Bluethroats (Luscinia svecica) and Collared Bushchats (Saxicola torquata) were doing.

Most of the Collared Bushchats we saw seemed typical, but one bird we watched often during the first two days at Kanha seemed aberrant. The upperparts were normal but the underparts were lacking a collar although the throat was grey and the breast pale rufous. The rest of the underparts were creamy. The tail had conspicuous amounts of white on the outer webs of the outer feathers. I do not know which subspecies this was. Most closely it resembles S. leucura which Ripley suggests may or may not be a separate species. In these open spaces around the Rest Houses we found Rufoustailed Finch Larks (Ammodramus phoenicurus), Ashy Crowned Finchlarks (Eremopterix grisea) large flocks of Waxbills (Estrilda amandava), and Spotted Munias (Lonchura punctulata). In these openings tanks had been constructed for the game to take water at. We found that they had also attracted good numbers of waterfowl, mostly Lesser Whistling Teal (Dendrocygna javanica) also smaller numbers of the Large Whistling Teal (D. bicolor) and several Common Teal (Anas crecca). In addition we found Spotted Sandpipers (Tringa glareola) and Common Sandpipers (T. hypoleucos) there were abundant Redwattled Lapwings and several Yellow-wattled Lapwings (Vanellus indicus and V. malabaricus).

Finally I shall mention the predators that we came across at Kanha before concluding this note on a most excellent short visit to a fine area. Most commonly seen apart from the three species of vulture that seemed ever overhead was the Crested Serpent Eagle (Spilornis cheela), never an hour seemed to pass without us seeing one of these handsome birds. On our final day we saw a lone Crested Hawk Eagle (Spizaetus cirrhatus) perched by the track leading out of the park. Everyday we saw Shikra (Accipiter badius) and Kestrels (Falco tinnunculus) and one day we saw a puzzling falcon that it seems must have been some race (maybe peregrinoides) of the Peregrine (Falco peregrinus). The distinctive characteristics of this bird, or birds, I should say as we saw a pair was the bold black barring on the flanks and the very distinctive call note which I wrote down at the time kit-weeoo. We first spotted the pair circling very high overhead when suddenly first one then the other went into a mighty stoop, it seemed they could have topped a hundred miles an hour, and they landed in a tall tree-top in a clearing.

In preparing this article I have merely gleaned a few pages of my field notebook. There was much that we saw, especially in the forest feeding parties, such as barbets, parakeets, minivets and drongos of several species which I have somehow not found space to mention. But many of these species are more familiar to me than most of those which I have mentioned and no doubt they are quite commonplace to most readers too. I have also omitted the many, many Hoodwinks (Nyctitator spp.) that came our way in several days we spent at Kanha.

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# BIRDS OF SIMLA IN AUTUMN

By

Usha Ganguli

I spent nearly 19 days in Simla from October 21 to November 8, 1966. The main object of this visit was to compare the birds of Simla in autumn with those of Ranikhet where I had spent three weeks in October-November 1965.

Simla is 7000 ft. above sea level, a thousand feet higher than Ranikhet and the vegetation varies accordingly with more firs, spruce, deodars and blue pines in the higher reaches, but the Himalayan Oak and Horse chestnut are common to both places. Simla lacks the wild cherry trees and the eucalyptus groves of Ranikhet and has few of the common pine trees, but it is richer in wild fruit and berry bearing trees and shrubs such as the Himalayan Holly, Cornus macrophylla, Rhamnus virgatus and others. As it is a fairly populous city and our hotel was centrally situated, I had to walk a mile in any direction before I could expect to find anything of interest. In contrast, I could watch a variety of birds in the hotel compound or from any of the quieter roads at Ranikhet. I found much of Simla proper singularly devoid of interesting birds, and only along the approaches to Jacko Hill did I see birds that interested me. Perhaps it would not be out of place to mention that I was surprised to find seven or eight varieties of butterflies visiting the last of the season's flowers. I hardly saw any skinks or lizards though I had seen both these and a snake at Ranikhet. I did see a family of martens on the Jacko Hill.

The Blackeared Kite and the following vultures: Pondicherry, Egyptian, Whitebacked, Bearded, and the Himalayan Griffon were common to both hill stations. The Whitebacked Vulture was seen up to a height of 8500 ft. near Kufri.

The peregrine falcon was the only raptor met with at Simla. It was seen flying leisurely among jungle crows and vultures on three occasions, each time with the jungle crows chasing it.

A lone male Kaleej Pheasant was sighted once on the road to Sanjoli.

The Rock Pigeon commonly seen about large buildings at Simla was absent from Ranikhet while the Rufous Turtle Dove was met with at both places.

The Slatyheaded Parakeet is present in most hill stations but the presence of the Large Indian Parakeets baffled me completely. I saw parties of two, three, and four on three occasions, twice near the office of the Chief Conservator of Forests. On the second occasion two males and a female were on an oak tree when one male drove out the other while the female entered a hole in the trunk of the tree!! The large crimson shoulder patch and the loud call were diagnostic. Whistler and Ripley give the range of this bird as up to 4000 ft. and 1000 ft. respectively.

The Great Himalayan Barbet, resident in most hill stations and the most noisy of the tribe was only heard occasionally, and the midget Spotted Piculet also a resident was seen only once in a small bamboo clump.

Woodpeckers were surprising few in number and variety and strangely silent too. In Ranikhet I saw six varieties of which three species, Scalybellied Green Woodpecker, Himalayan Pied Woodpecker and the Brownfronted Woodpecker were uncommonly numerous and vociferous. These were the only three varieties that were seen at Simla. Why were they so few in number? There was no appreciable difference in temperature between the two places at that time of the year, so perhaps the altitude had something to do with the lack of insects on which these birds feed. Perhaps my young friend Julian Donahue who is specializing on entomology will enlighten me. The Common Myna in

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The Jungle Crow was the boldest and most abundant bird in every part of the city from the most crowded areas to deep shady hillsides. I saw some of them pulling out from a burning pile some food stuff that was being roasted or smoked. Their unusual abundance probably explains the total absence of the Blackthroated Jay. The Redbilled Blue Magpie was also scarce at Simla. I saw four on one occasion feeding on wild pear and heard them a few times. This and the Jay were uncommonly bold and abundant at Ranikhet.

Simla was rich in thrushes and chats at that time. One morning I saw the Chestnutbellied Rock Thrust which looked like a hornet with a brown and yellow banded abdomen.

The highlight of my birdwatching was the sight of 4 thrushes, two of which were new to me. I had noticed a narrow footpath that went up through a grove of Abies which appeared too shady for birds. Only towards the end of my stay when I saw nothing of interest for days did I go up the tortuous path to discover that the forest of firs was interspersed with Himalayan Holly and soon came to a little clearing where a golden beam of sunlight lighted up an enormous manure heap. This was surrounded by various types of shrubs and a single deciduous tree; Cornus macrophylla ? completely bare but full of tiny clusters of small blackish berries. The manure heap had attracted several Orange-flanked Bush Robins, all in female plumage. As some male birds sometimes breed in that plumage I suppose there were some male birds among them. A few were on the heap. Others were flitting about the bushes. I saw one or two male birds in brilliant plumage, but they were rather shy and kept to the centre and lower branches of the shrubs and bushes. There I saw two Plainbacked Mountain Thrushes, (Zoothera mollissima) and two Small-billed Mountain Thrushes (Zoothera dauma) feeding at the opposite edges of the heap. Both these birds were new to me. According to A. E. Jones the Plainbacked Mountain Thrushes are rare in Simla. Suddenly a Grey-headed Thrush appeared at another corner of the manure dump! I had seen this bird only once 3 years ago at Gulmarg in June for a few moments, but I was fortunate enough to hear its wonderful song for at least ten minutes. To this day I cannot say which is the finest song bird in India, the Greywinged Blackbird or the Greyheaded Thrush. Watching this beautiful thrush at such close quarters I was thinking of my first encounter with it when a male Greywinged Blackbird appeared on the scene while the Greyheaded Thrush disappeared. Soon two Variegated Laughing Thrushes were busy feeding from the heap and a Streaked Laughing Thrush foraged about the undergrowth nearby and a Himalayan Whistling Thrush flew in and landed on a tall bush.

I visited this charming spot on the remaining two days of our stay, and not only did I see all four kinds of thrushes and the Bush Robins feeding on various berries, chasing each other through the fir trees; occasionally visiting the manure heap but I also saw in that limited area: Shortbilled Minivet, Whitecheeked Bulbul, Black Bulbul, Stripethroated Siva, Black-headed Sibia, Greyheaded Flycatcher, Yellowbellied Fantail Flycatcher, Greyheaded Flycatcher-Warbler, Orange-gorgetted Flycatcher, Rufous-breasted Accentor, Crested Black Tit, Redheaded Tit, Greenbacked Tit, Himalayan Tree Creeper, Whitetailed Nuthatch, Himalayan Pied Woodpecker, and the Bluefronted Redstart.

I wish to add that all the four thrushes were completely silent. The Variegated Laughing Thrush had several different calls like the Black-headed Sibia which was fairly common at Simla. The Himalayan Whistling Thrush sang quite often.

I did not see any sunbirds but one day I was very fortunate in seeing 2 male Firebreasted Flowerpeckers in a garden one of which had a thin black line running down from the red breast to the centre of the abdomen. This puzzled me at first but Stuart Baker says that the black patch under the crimson breast is sometimes prolonged down the centre of the abdomen. The Whitetailed Nuthatch, is resident, fairly common and very noisy even

in autumn. I saw one bird on the ground picking up several small black things one after another in a row in its bill, then flying off. Ranikhet has the Cinnamonbellied Nuthatch which is resident and equally noisy at that time. The House Sparrow and the Cinnamon Tree Sparrow were common residents but I was surprised to see 2 Spotted Munias on a deodar. I had seen this bird at Kasauli 6000 ft. in June, at Bhatrojkhan 5200 ft. near Ranikhet in November and in June at Ooty 7200 ft. where it was breeding.

On a day's trip to Wild Flower Hall 8200 ft. near Kufri the only two unusual birds seen were a lone Wren (Troglodytes) and a pair of Meadow Buntings.

There were two birds which I was unable to identify. The first, about the size of a Grey Tit, was ashy brown above had a rufous tail with dark central feathers; a broad indistinct fulvous supercilium, no white ring round the eye; whole of the underside pale ashy; chin and throat very white contrasting with darkish head and cheeks and pale ashy underparts. It was constantly flicking its wings. It flew up from a small bush and caught a fairly large winged insect. I saw it again about the same place (below Grand Hotel) in the evening uttering a harsh cry. I never saw it after that. The second was about as large as the Orange-flanked Bush Robin but slimmer, the whole upper back including wings was ash grey; lores, sides of face, forewing and tail black; chin, throat and upper breast (like a bib) blackish; rest of underside white as also a broad white patch through the wings. In behaviour it was like a Redstart, dropping down to the ground from its perch for insects. It was also feeding on the blackish berries of Cornus macrophylla. I am almost certain that this was the bird that I had seen at Ranikhet the year before hawking insects like a flycatcher from its perch on a tree!

I do hope some birdwatchers will identify these birds for me.

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#### BIRD-RINGING

By

D. N. Mathew

#### General

Some small-scale ringing was done in Great Britain from 1890 onwards, but Christian Mortenson of Viborg Denmark (1899) was the first person to undertake systematic large scale ringing, Germany took up the study in 1903, France 1903, Great Britain 1909, Yugoslavia 1910, Holland 1911, Sweden 1911, Denmark 1914, Norway 1914. In the new world the American Bird Banding Association was founded in 1909. Before 1914 Jack Miner was marking wildfowl with rings carrying Biblical quotations instead of serial numbers!

The U. S. S. R., Japan, Egypt, the Republic of S. Africa, Belgian Congo, Tasmania, New Zealand, Australia and Pakistan are the other countries where bird ringing is done on a large scale.

Bird ringing is thus free of any regional slant. Every year bird ringers the world over ring over 1,000,000 birds about 600,000 of these in the U.S. and Canada.

#### Bird ringing in India

His Highness the Maharaja of Dhar was probably the first person to start bird ringing in India. Out of the 200 ducks and teals ringed at Dhar between 1926 and 1929, ten were recovered by 1935. During 1928 and 1929 ringing was started in Bahawalpur State and some ringing of ducks and teals was done there again in the late 30's. Some ringing was done at Bharatpur also.



that time. The House Sparrow and the Cinnamon Tree Sparrow were common residents but I was surprised to see -2 Spotted Munias on a deodar. I had seen this bird at Kasauli 6000 ft. in June, at Bhatrojkhan 5200 ft. near Ranikhet in November and in June at Ooty 7200 ft. where it was breeding.

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D. N. Mathew

#### General

Some small-scale ringing was done in Great Britain from 1890 onwards, but Christian Mortenson of Viborg Denmark (1899) was the first person to undertake systematic large scale ringing, Germany took up the study in 1903, Denmark 1903, Great Britain 1909, Yugoslavia 1910, Holland 1911, Sweden 1911, Denmark 1914, Norway 1914. In the new world the American Bird Banding Association was founded in 1909. Before 1914 Jack Miner was marking wildfowl with rings carrying Biblical quotations instead of serial numbers!

The U. S. S. R., Japan, Egypt, the Republic of S. Africa, Belgian Congo, Tasmania, New Zealand, Australia and Pakistan are the other countries where bird ringing is done on a large scale.

Bird ringing is thus free of any regional slant. Every year bird ringers the world over ring over 1,000,000 birds about 600,000 of these in the U.S. and Canada.

#### Bird ringing in India

His Highness the Maharaja of Dhar was probably the first person to start bird ringing in India. Out of the 200 ducks and teals ringed at Dhar between 1926 and 1929, ten were recovered by 1935. During 1928 and 1929 ringing was started in Bahawalpur State and some ringing of ducks and teals was done there again in the late 30's. Some ringing was done at Baranpur also during the same period. In all, about 500 or so



ducks were ringed by 1959.

### The BNHS/WHO BIRD MIGRATION STUDY FIELD PROJECT.

In 1959, the World Health Organization took up Dr Salim Ali's proposal that a project of ringing migratory birds at suitable localities be started with the special purpose of investigating the possible role of birds in the dissemination of arthropod-borne viruses. Special attention was to be focused on the transmission of viruses responsible Kayasanoor Forest Disease (K. F. D.) which killed men and monkeys at Kayasanoor in Mysore.

Thus in 1959, with the expert advice of Dr. A. Schifferli of Switzerland and with the cooperation of the Virus Research Centre, Poona, the Bombay Natural History Society started the present programme of bird ringing. Birds trapped in mist nets or by trappers are marked with numbered rings bearing legends INFORM BOMBAY NAT. HIST. SOCIETY and are examined for ectoparasites like ticks. These ticks are sent to the V. R. C. for Virological Studies. Besides, blood-smears and blood-soaked discs are collected for studies by Russian experts in the USSR.

By 1966 November, the BNHS/WHO Project has ringed a total of 74,379 birds of 128 forms. Of these 87 have been recovered in various parts of the world, largely in the USSR by December 1966.

#### Ringling of Passerine Birds

Among the perching birds the project has concentrated on the ringling of migratory wagtails. Mention must be made here of the remarkable discovery of the gigantic wagtail roosts in Central Travancore in Kerala. In 1961 Shri P. V. George, a Zoology Teacher at a College near Kottayam found large numbers of wagtails flying in a particular direction every evening. From a knowledge of the average speed of flight and the time before night fall George estimated the rough distance of the roost from his site of observation. His surmise was proved correct and the roost was located at the village of Edanad near the town of Chengannur. Here a few square miles of sugar cane plantation is used by millions of yellow wagtails as nightly roost, day after day from November to April every year. As a result of intensive ringling at this roost during the years 1961-64 the project has banded over 48,000 wagtails 14 of which have been recovered in various places in Burma, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the USSR. These ten recoveries even though only one for ever 4800 or so roughly indicate some of the possible routes taken by these migratory passerines. For instance a Forest Wagtail which visits our country from Siberia during the cold season was ringed at Chengannur in Kerala on 25th March 1963 and ~~xxx~~ recovered at Tiddim Chin Hills in Burma on 25th April in the same year. A Yellow Wagtail ringed on 2nd February 1963 at Chengannur was collected near Kabul by a Kabuli school-boy and handed over to his teacher on 10th May in the same year. This teacher happened to be the

keen German biologist, Dr Meyer-Ohme, who not only reported the matter to us but also took part in our next ringling session at Kerala in 1964. Thus birds can act as ambassadors of goodwill! As more of our banded birds have been recovered from farther north of Kabul in the Kirghizia in Russia, and also from south near Lahore in W. Pakistan, our work would indicate that some of the Yellow Wagtails which visit us from Russia do pass through Afghanistan and Pakistan crossing the Hindukush mountains between longitudes 65° and 75°. However, at least 50 recoveries are needed to make our experiments conclusive. Also interesting were the two inland recoveries of wagtails ringed at Bhanupur and Calcutta which were subsequently recovered at Chengannur in Kerala.

#### Ringling of Ducks

Our ringling of migratory ducks have been more fruitful in terms of recoveries. Out of some 2300 ducks ringed by us in the past 5 years in Rajasthan and Bihar 50 or 2.14% have been recovered in various parts

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Teal which visits us in winter from central and eastern parts of Russia; we have ringed 1206 birds of this species and have recovered 30 or about 2.5%. It is interesting to note that common teal ringed at a particular locality in Monghyr district in Bihar have been recovered in areas in Russia as far apart as longitudes 71° (Uzbekistan) and 132° in East Yakutian ASSR in Siberia.

Compared with the number of recoveries reported from Russia, those from our own country either of our rings or of Russian rings is very poor. It is believed that many of our sportsmen who shoot banded birds fail to report the matter promptly. The few recoveries we have had so far indicate that most of our migratory visitors come from various parts of Russia. One of our banded buntings -- a bird related to sparrow -- was recovered in Cyprus. Much more remains to be known about the exact routes of most of these birds and about their role in the transmission of diseases if any. Only more intensive ringing in many centres in the country and better rates of report of recoveries can provide adequate answers to these and many related problems of bird migration.

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#### NOTES AND COMMENTS

We are happy to reproduce here the report of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of Roorkee for 1966. The small batch of birdwatchers in Roorkee seem to have been active throughout the year. It would be interesting if Regional Editors of other areas also report on their activity -- or inactivity -- in the past year.

##### Birdwatchers' Field Club of Roorkee

During the year 1966, a varied programme was arranged. A good number of members and their friends participated in field outings which were organised at least once a month.

Five special lectures were arranged. Dr Robert R. R. Brooks, Cultural Attache, United States Information Service, New Delhi, addressed the Club on BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA. The lecture was illustrated with slides. Lt. Gen. Sir Harold Williams described the ducks found in Northern India and explained the project OBSERVATION SURVEYS AND COUNTS OF MIGRATORY WILDFOWL. He also arranged to show the film WILD WINGS.

Mr Gurdial Singh, member of the successful Indian expedition to Everest spoke on EVEREST illustrating his lecture with slides. As part of the Club's membership enrollment drive, Dr Joseph George gave a talk on BIRDWATCHING FOR BEGINNERS to an audience consisting largely of students. Mr M. D. Chaturvedi retired Inspector General of Forests, addressed the Club on WILD LIFE IN INDIA.

A new feature introduced during the year was the screening of films on birds and other wild life. Films loaned by the British Information Services and the Forest Research Institute, Dehra Dun, were shown on four occasions. This activity has become popular with students.

Joseph George  
Honorary Secretary  
%Central Building Research Institute  
Roorkee, U.P. 27 Jan. 1967

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#### CORRESPONDENCE

##### Birdwatching in Kolaba

In last December's issue of the Newsletter Mr Futehal ly wrote of the 'superb view from fairly close quarters' which he and I recently obtained in Dharamtar Creek, Kolaba, of a 'Hen-Harrier'. Since no reader familiar with Kolaba's birdshas so far made any comment on this note I am doing so myself. I think it is worth while, because the range of the Hen-Harrier (Circus cyaneus) is described in Ripley's SYNOPSIS as 'West Pakistan and northern India, east to north Burma'.

The bird we saw fidgeted about on a low bush less than ten yards away from us and gave us an excellent, though too brief, opportunity to study its plumage in excellent light. To judge from the unsullied rufous-buff of the underparts, it was a young bird. Young males and both young and old females of all of the Indian species of harriers except the Marsh are notoriously difficult to identify with certainty in the field, and although some authorities (like G. M. Henry) would have us believe that separation is possible on visual characteristics alone, others are less optimistic. To be really sure of a bird's identity one must inspect its primaries in the hand, and measure its tarsus. Some times putative field diagnosis can be supported, if not confirmed, by the presence of an identifiable adult male in the vicinity. Indeed, on this occasion there was a male bird about, but it was too far away for us to identify with confidence, and hence also too remote from the other bird for it to be safe to assume any relationship. All we had to go on therefore was a good view of a bird with a very distinct buff ruff, unstreaked with sepia, which immediately reminded me of the Pale Harrier (Circus macrourus) in G. M. Henry's painting (A GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF CEYLON, plate 19).

The Montagu's Harrier (C. pygargus) does not have a distinct ruff, and that of the Pied Harrier (C. melanoleucos) is more or less streaked with sepia, but even if we are bold enough to eliminate these possibilities we are still left with two alternatives Pale (C. macrourus) and Hen (C. cyaneus). I have recently examined the skins of some of the harriers in the Bombay Natural History Society's collection, and if their labels are correct (some of the harriers' are evidently not), the females of these two species look too similar for separation in the field to be possible — at any rate, by your correspondent. I cannot myself assign the bird we saw to a species with any confidence. On the grounds that the known range of C. cyaneus does not seem to embrace Bombay, it is surely more probable that our bird was macrourus.

R. A. Stewart Melliush

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#### The arrival of the Bank Myna in Bhubaneswar

One of us (S. D. J.) has been in Bhubaneswar since August 1962, and has since then been recording every species of bird that he observes and which he can identify. The other two arrived in Bhubaneswar in February 1966. But since then they have done fairly intensive birdwatching in the Bhubaneswar area, particularly near their home in the area that lies between the New Capital and the old religious centre. Therefore it is unlikely that a bird of the size, appearance and behaviour of a Bank Myna (Acridotheres ginginianus) would have been missed by all three of us, had individuals of this species been present in Bhubaneswar before the date on which we saw them.

On January 19, 1967, while L. W. was hoping to show S. D. J. a Wryneck that L. W. and S. W. had seen several times less than 100 m. from their house, the three of us saw two Bank Mynas on the ground just outside a vacant compound. Two Bank Mynas, presumably the same ones, spent much of their day from then until January 23 on the same patch of land. Common Mynas were always present when the Bank Mynas were. Other birds usually present were several Common Swallows, many Jungle Crows, seven to ten Common Drongos, five Motacilla alba (two presumably personata in breeding plumage, three presumably dukhunensis), two Pipits, two Pied Bushchats (Saxicola caprata) and two Indian Robins (Saxicoloides fulicata). Occasionally present were two Bush-larks (Mirafra sp.) and a Wryneck. The small patch of land had not attracted many birds until the beginning of the year when (a) the soil was turned and (merely coincidentally) (b) a five-day gathering of sadhus and pilgrims scattered food and refuse in the area.

Though it is not surprising to find the Bank Myna in this part of India, it is perhaps worth recording such first appearance in a specific area in the Newsletter.

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S.D. Jayakar, Louis Werner and Susan Werner  
Bhubaneswar

Behaviour of an escape Chloropses

Your readers will be interested to know that I have about six chloropses; one of them a Goldfronted one flew away, and one fine morning I was surprised to see the bird returning to the garden after a lapse of more than six months. As soon as I opened the cage and put in some fruit, it got back into it. They are the best mimics and song birds I have ever had. Only one of them is a goldfronted one; the rest are of still brighter colours with electric blue on their wings and . mauve borders on their tails.

P. Edalji

Calcutta

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Zafar Futehally

Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers

32-A Juhu Lane, Andheri, Bombay 58-AS

# NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 7—No. 4—1967 April



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### BIRDWATCHING AT NARKANDA (SIMLA)

By

Bro. A. Navarro, S.J. and Mr. A. Dubash

For our birdwatching excursion last October, we marked Simla as the venue from where we could most conveniently make detours to the surrounding countryside. Mr. Daniel of the B.N.H.S. had informed the Chief "Wild Life" Warden (Himachal Pradesh), Mr. K.L. Mehta, beforehand of our projects, and so on our arrival at the Forest Dept. Simla, we were pleasantly surprised to find that we were not altogether strangers to the staff officers. In fact Mr. Mehta had carefully outlined for us several programmes so that we could utilise to the utmost the short period of our stay and see as much as possible of the best fauna of that locality.

Thanks to the spontaneous and enthusiastic co-operation of Mr. Mehta our trip proved to be a success. Mr. Mehta was not only aware of the need for the up-to-date upkeep and maintenance of the status of the present fauna but determined to go further and try to improve it. By his own unstinted efforts Mr. Mehta has brought about the remarkable achievement of simultaneously building up a combined zoo and pheasantry.

Narkanda was the spot selected as the headquarters for our birdwatching as it happens to have a nice and comfortable P.W.D. bungalow ideally situated on the mountain ranges and in which we rented two rooms for our stay. Before our departure for Narkanda, Mr. Mehta invited us to pay a visit to his Pheasantry and he accompanied us round the magnificent zoo and pheasantry which he is trying to build up on quite a big scale.

Situated on the outskirts of Simla town, the zoo cum pheasantry stands in the recess of a valley. The locale of this zoo is unusual; in fact it does not resemble at all the ordinary types of zoos, as most of the animals like Sambhar, the Chital (Spotted Deer), and some birds were kept in their natural surroundings - that is, a wire netting fence served to enclose a part of the forest area so that the animals could roam about freely. Some of the rare animals in the zoo were the Musk Deer, a She-Yak, with her young one and the cubs of both the black and the brown Himalayan Bears. The Musk Deer was more timid and shy than the other animals.

Mr. Mehta has succeeded in maintaining a beautiful pheasantry, perhaps the only one of its kind in India where he breeds various Indian and foreign pheasants. Amongst the pheasants that he was breeding were the common Kalij pheasant, the Koklas, the Monal pheasant with its brilliant plumage, the



the Chinese Silver Pheasant and the Japanese Golden Pheasant.

The Indian pheasants were breeding very well. All the birds were looked after very well by a devoted staff of workers. Although the birds were in captivity, a striking point was that their plumage was in an excellent condition and they seemed to be at home in the scenic surroundings of the Himalayas.

There was a small artificial pond at the entrance of the zoo where they had kept a pair of Bar-headed Geese, White-eyed Pochards, Red-headed Pochards, a pair of Swans, white in colour, which, we were told, were imported from Russia. They are very well fed and looked healthy. In a separate pond enclosed by a wire netting were a pair of black Swans. As soon as we went near the netting to have a closer look at the birds, the male black swan rushed towards us and started pecking aggressively at the wire netting, so much so that we thought it would break its red beak. There were also a tame kite and a young eagle which we could not identify. In another mixed aviary there were different varieties of Mynias and a pair of green Finches.

Undoubtedly, along the Himalayan region extending from Kashmir to Darjeeling right up to and around Bhutan and Assam, we find the best and the most colourful avian fauna of India. Part of the Himalayan ranges belong to the Palearctic region and part to the Indo-Chinese region. In spite of this division it is very curious to observe that there is a certain uniformity of fauna along the Himalayan range with the difference that within this uniformity the eastern and the western sides have produced their own forms. That is why often in the English nomenclature we come across definite terms by which we distinguish the eastern and western positions of the species, for example, when they say: the Eastern Spotted Forktail and Western Spotted Forktail. However we found that with a keen sense of observation we would be able to discover certain isolated spots with their own typical and selective fauna that naturally will be based on several factors, such as topography, altitude, flora, temperature, dampness, water and exposure to strong currents and draughts. In particular the last factor may occasionally be responsible for scarcity of bird-life in areas where there should be found a larger and more variety of birds.

Gathering the results of our findings and analysing our observations at the end of the third day, we found that in certain areas we could scarcely see any birds except for the Jungle Crows, Mynahs, Nutcrackers and a few Thrushes but in other areas there was plenty of bird-life. Later we realised the fact that the side hills facing the open view of the snow peaks of the Himalayas were less frequented by birds. The main reason for this could not be other than the open exposure to the strong, cold and freezing winds coming from that side.

Narkanda is 40 miles from Simla, its altitude being about 9,500 ft. The hill ranges opposite to Narkanda are 10,000 ft. high and the highest, Hattu Peak is 10,500 ft. At this (Hattu Peak) altitude we saw the Himalayan Mouse-Hare, a tail-less creature which is typical of the Himalayan ranges. On the same place we saw the Accentor or Hedge Sparrow. This is a bird that very rarely can be seen below an altitude of 9,000 ft. Nearby on several occasions we saw large and small parties of Hodgson's Mountain Finch. Both these are birds found at a very high altitude and during the summer season they return to their usual habitat which is about 17,000 ft. The little brown Wren was seen hopping amongst the desolate ruins of the Hattu Peak temple.

From the very first day we observed that the most common birds were the Himalayan Crow and the Himalayan Spotted Nutcracker. Here and there at different altitudes we came across the Red-billed Blue Magpie and infrequently we had a glimpse of the Himalayan Jay.

We unexpectedly came across not less than five varieties of Tits, viz. the Indian Grey Tit, the Simla Coal Tit, the Brown-Crested Tit, the Red-headed Tit, and the Yellow-Cheeked Tit. In their company we noticed the Simla Warbler and some other warblers which we could not identify. These small birds could be seen flying in mixed parties, and they are found everywhere except in the open country.

The forest was mainly built up of three varieties of trees, namely, Pine, Rhododendron and Fir. These little creatures, the Tits and the Warblers, apparently preferred the Rhododendron for their roosting resorts. Certain it is that this is the tree that offers them more protection from the weather and safety from their enemies.

We never came across a great number of Thrushes; nevertheless we had a chance to see seven varieties. But the White-Throated Laughing Thrush was seen only once. At the outskirts of the forest we often came across parties of Gilgit Laughing Thrushes. Once we saw a small party of Small-Billed Mountain Thrush. The Simla Plane-Backed Thrush could be seen everywhere on any altitude but always in pairs. On a few occasions we observed parties of Red-Headed Thrushes on the ground. Once we saw the Blue-Headed Rock Thrush, and the Himalayan Whistling Thrush could be found along the main roads and footpaths through the forest.

Now and then with Tits and Warblers we found two varieties of Nuthatches, the White-Tailed Nuthatch being the most common and the White-Cheeked Nuthatch. The latter is a pretty bird and looks more like a tail-less Wagtail but it is a pity that it has such a melancholy call. Twice we observed the Rusty-Cheeked Scimitar Babbler.

Another common bird in the forest was the Himalayan Tree Creeper, and on a few occasions we saw the Hodgson's Tree Creeper. This Tree Creeper is smaller and the breast and abdomen are lighter than the Himalayan Tree Creeper.

At Simla we saw very often the Black-Headed Sibia, Cinnamon Tree Sparrow and the Red Vented Bulbul. The White Cheeked Bulbul was not very common at Narkanda but we had the chance to observe a few pairs. The Blue-Fronted Redstart was occasionally seen around an altitude of 10,000 ft. but the White-Caped Redstart was found only at the foot of the hill along the nullahs and rivulets. Several times we came across small parties of Blue-Headed Robins and with them we noticed the presence of a few of Red-Flanked Bush Robins.

The black and yellow Grosbeaks could be seen in small parties but always in the forest; at times we observed them on the ground searching for food, but when not on the ground they could be seen perching on the tops of the highest trees. They are rather sociable and noisy birds in their behaviour and we observed that most of them were in a heavy moult. In their group once we saw the Pink Browed Rose-Finch.

Coming out of the forest on a large open part of ground about 9,000 ft. high, with some undergrowth, we found a pair of Rock Buntings. This is another bird which has a preference for high altitudes. On the same spot we saw the Fire-Breasted Flower Pecker.

The Sind Pied Woodpecker could be noticed everywhere. On a few occasions we found the Western Rufous Woodpecker but only once had we the pleasure of admiring at a high altitude of 10,000 ft. the beautiful "Broadbill Roller" that was perched on a high Fir tree in the interior of the forest. On the same grounds nearby we found small parties of the Great Himalayan Parbets. In the late evenings, by their calls we could identify the Collared Pigmy Owlet and Himalayan Scops Owl.

As for large Birds, we noticed the Indian Griffon Vulture and the White Scavenger Vulture. On more than one occasion we had a chance to admire the majestic flight at a rather low altitude of the Himalayan Bearded Vulture. The Indian Black Eagle and the Indian Serpent Eagle were also seen several times.

The only dove we came across frequently was the Rufus Turtle Dove. A few of these birds were found right into the forest.

We found three varieties of pheasants. The White-Crested Kalij was to be found often on the lower part of the hills. The Koklas pheasants, the most common of all three, were seen at a much higher altitude but the Impeyan pheasant or the Monal was always found on the topmost part of the hill very well around 10,200 ft. Both the Koklas and the Monal gave us the impression that they liked heavy forest and precipitous hill-sides so steep and difficult to manouver that at times it was not possible to follow their trail. The Chukor Partridge was noticed on the outskirts of the forests mostly around cultivations.

With reference to my previous remark - 'isolated spots with its own typical and selective fauna' - I would definitely consider the Narkanda range to be an example of a locality with its own selective fauna. At the end of our birdwatching excursion we found in our list a total absence of Flycatchers, Babblers, Pigeons, Sunbirds and in general a very scanty population of Passerine birds. Nevertheless we are quite aware that our list cannot be considered as a complete survey of the Fauna of Narkanda range having in view that the bird population in regions where the four seasons of the year are well defined changes every season.

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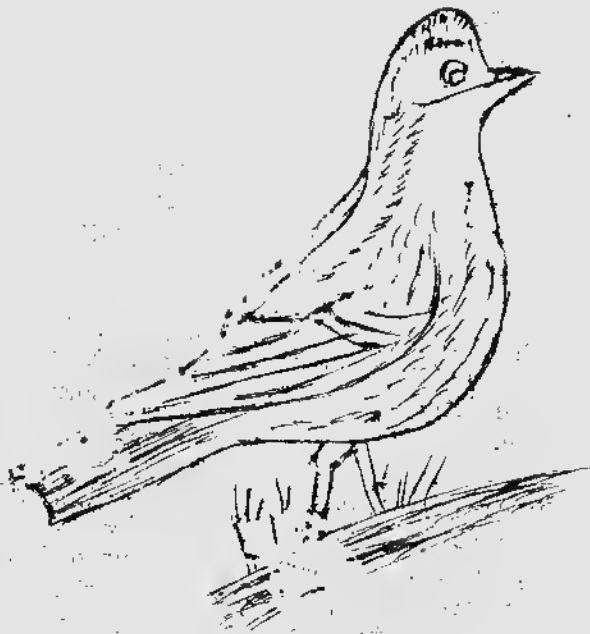
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## LARKS

By

Mrs. Jamal Ara



Larks, the most terrestrial of Passerine birds belonging to the Alaudidae family, are familiar little birds forming a well defined small group of their own. They have large pointed wings to sustain them in their hovering flight, the longest primaries being much longer than the secondaries. The tail is always shorter than the wings and slightly forked. The shape of the bill varies according to the food habits of the particular bird and ranges from short and thick, conoid to long, slender and slightly curved. They have a well marked crest, formed by the elongation of the feathers of the crown, which

is "eared" in the Horned Larks. Their feet are well suited to running on the ground by taking alternate steps instead of hopping like most small birds. Their shanks have separate scales up to the back as well as the front. The hind toe bearing a straight claw, is much longer and sometimes more elongated while the claws of the forward toes are slightly curved, and generally short. This distinguishes them from other families of similar habits. Their plumage is usually brown below; while some are nearly plain or black. This colouring is very well adapted for concealing themselves by merging with the background of their habitat. The variations in the plumage of individual species is linked up with their habitat: Thus species living in the desert are very pale under the influence of a dry atmosphere while

The only dove we came across frequently was the Rufus Turtle Dove. A few of these birds were found right into the forest.

We found three varieties of pheasants. The White-Crested Kalij was to be found often on the lower part of the hills. The Koklas pheasants, the most common of all three, were seen at a much higher altitude but the Impeyan pheasant or the Monal was always found on the topmost part of the hill very well around 10,200 ft. Both the Koklas and the Monal gave us the impression that they liked heavy forest and precipitous hill-sides so steep and difficult to manouver that at times it was not possible to follow their trail. The Chukor Partridge was noticed on the outskirts of the forests mostly around cultivations.

With reference to my previous remark - 'isolated spots with its own typical and selective fauna' - I would definitely consider the Narkanda range to be an example of a locality with its own selective fauna. At the end of our birdwatching excursion we found in our list a total absence of Flycatchers, Babblers, Pigeons, Sunbirds and in general a very scanty population of Passerine birds. Nevertheless we are quite aware that our list cannot be considered as a complete survey of the Fauna of Narkanda range having in view that the bird population in regions where the four seasons of the year are well defined changes every season.

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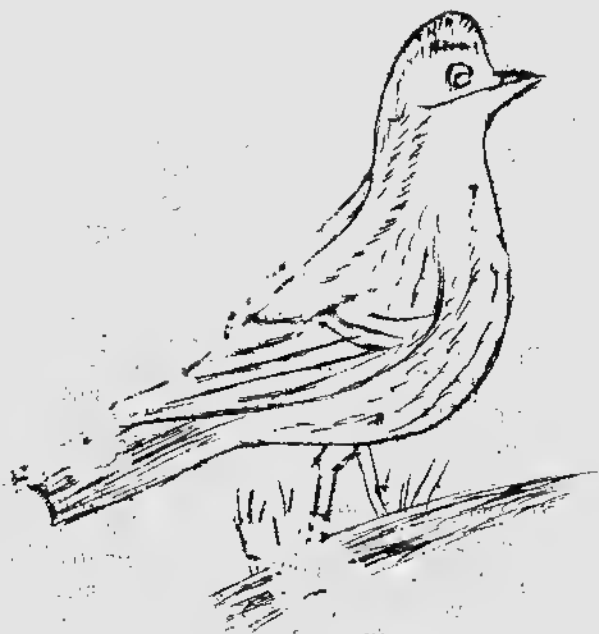
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#### LARKS

By

Mrs. Jamal Ara



Larks, the most terrestrial of Passerine birds belonging to the Alaudidae family, are familiar little birds forming a well defined small group of their own. They have large pointed wings to sustain them in their hovering flight, the longest primaries being much longer than the secondaries. The tail is always shorter than the wings and slightly forked. The shape of the bill varies according to the food habits of the particular bird and ranges from short and thick, conoid to long, slender and slightly curved. They have a well marked crest, formed by the elongation of the feathers of the crown, which

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those which prefer humid areas have a darker livery. The larks love to roll and shuffle in the dust instead of washing themselves. Most of them feed on grass seeds and grains after harvest; but also consume a large number of insects. They constantly remain on the ground, seldom perching during the day but never at night. They naturally nest on the ground - collecting grass in a hollow. Their eggs are greenish with speckles and blotches.

They make up for their lack of brilliance in plumage by a gift of melody, some being good singers. They are gregarious assembling in large flocks specially during winter. Most of them are resident but some, such as the Sky larks of Europe (*Alauda arvensis*) which also inhabits the Himalayas, migrate long distances.

I will deal here only with those larks with whom I have spent many a happy hour both in the field as well as in hand - an old Mirshikar used to bring them for me to fondle first before selling. The place was Gidhaur in Monghyr district. Gidhaur is 300 ft. above sea level, a fairly large village situated between two small rivers, with no forests within range but large amounts of cultivation of all kinds. Large patches of sugarcane, sandy beds, grassy and rocky tracts and fallow fields were the ideal dwelling places for the larks.

The first lark which comes to my mind is the Ashycrowned Finch Lark or "Gotowli". Many a time it has allowed me to approach it very closely, but all the time keeping a very careful watch with its pair of black smiling eyes; but whenever it realised that I was crossing my limit it would fly off playfully a few yards and settle down again closeby. It is fully aware of its protective colouring and remains crouched, thus escaping notice.

The "Gotowli" is the most amusing and playful of all larks. It delights in springing suddenly in the air to a height of 30 to 35 ft., and then descending with closed wings, till it almost touches the ground; then up again it goes thus repeating the performance 8-10 times. This merry game goes on until a rival attempts to join the fun, then it darts off after the intruder and chases it away some distance. This is most common during courtship.

Apart from this, the "Gotowli" is easily recognised by its colouring. The male is dark grey with white cheeks and sides of breast; a broad black band down the middle with a black streak running through the eyes. It correctly points out, the black on the throat forms a Cross. The female is lighter wherever the male is black.

During the breeding season the males are tireless singers, singing both on the ground as well as in the air. While singing in the air the flight comprises a series of steep rises and falls. The song is a sweet trill like 'Trrrrrrrrrr' without variations.

The most famous, and at the same time the most familiar songster of the group is the Sky Lark or "Bhurut". The Sky Lark bears the name "Alauda", believed to be from a Celtic word meaning "great or high songsters", and in Italian it is, "Allodola", "the one who gives praise", no name could be more fitting. During the chilly winter the bird is more or less silent, but bursts into song as soon as spring re-awakens the slumbering fires of day. The sky lark sings with the break of dawn, soaring as if to look for the sun still far below the horizon; and ends with the shadows of night closing in. No doubt the song, as in other birds, is the main factor of success during the critical time of courtship. During this period, the singing and soaring of the males increase. They spring up from the ground and rise to a great height in the air until they are invisible, "and rainlike music scatters from on high". The birds rise almost vertically, with their heads against the wind, on fluttering wings, veering now to the right, now to the left. The soaring differs from that of a bird of prey, as it is accomplished by the continuous effort and action of the wings. Then the descent begins - the birds

come down after having reached the desirable height, with their wings outstretched, without any beats, the tune changing as well. Finally as they draw nearer the earth, the song ceases and they drop like a stone till they are within a few feet of the ground.

Each bird has its domain over a certain area of ground which he guards jealously against all rivals; and from there all trespassers of his own sex are firmly and promptly driven out. In the occupied breeding area, several males can be seen chasing a female with great rapidity through the air, and every now and then breaking out into the sweetest of song. Sometimes, a male will hover above a female who crouches down amongst the grass, and in various ways the male seeks to display his charms.

After the courtship is over, a cup-shaped nest of grass and roots is placed on the ground amidst longer grass. The actual construction of the nest is done chiefly by the female, with the male collecting the materials. But in the incubation and the feeding of the young, the male bears his share of the burden.

A closer inspection reveals that the sky lark is somewhat larger than a sparrow, with wings long for its size, and a thin feeble bill. The plain, streaky brown plumage is the same in both sexes. There is white in the outer tail feathers while the chin, throat and breast have numerous black streaks. The hind claws are very long and straight.

The Ganges sand lark or "Retal" is differentiated from the sky lark by its small size, dull white under plumage with some brown streaks on the breast, and a more slender bill. The flight is not very strong and it never SOARS. The "Retal" never wanders far from the river-side into the adjoining fields. When the bird is in love, a pleasant and musical note can be heard throughout the day. These notes can be heard as the bird flits about from one sand-bank to another, or is on wing.

In the month of April a nest was seen in Gidhaur by me in a slight depression in the sand lined with grass while a few soft white feathers were placed in the middle.

The singing bush lark or "Aghin" has the inner web of the outer tail feathers white; a short and stout bill, and a slightly curved hind toe. "Aghin" flies better and higher than the "Retal", but it too, never soars only flutters in the air. The bird frequents open land, grassy, stony, and cultivated tracts. It often perches when disturbed. A sweet song is sung both on the wing or while seated on a bush.

The nest, well hidden among longer grass, is made out of fine grass mixed with soft feathers. I found a nest in June among sugar-cane fields at Gidhaur. Dry cane leaves were used on the outer side of the nest while the inside was lined with softer grass. It contained two eggs tinged with light green and buff on a white back ground.

The crested lark or "Chundool" differs from all the other larks by possessing a long and powerful bill in addition to the head being decorated with a sharp pointed crest, composed of a few long feathers, which project backwards and upwards from the back of the head. The underparts are creamy white with dark streaks strongly marked on the breast. The "Chundool" loves to spend its time in ploughed fields and open plains. Its habits and manners fall halfway between the sky lark and the Bush lark. Similarly, the song as well is somewhere between these two. The "Chundool" soars like the "Ehurut" and sings on wing - the song is sweet "Tee-urr, Tee-urr, Tee", repeated 3-4 times.

on the ground in the shelter of a stone or even a clod. The eggs are mostly incubated by the female, but male helps in feeding the young and brings food quicker than the female.

The Rufous-tailed finch lark or "Aqqiya" is a dark-brown bird with red on the lower back and tail. The bill is thick and slightly curved. "Aqqiya" visits all kinds of open country, ploughed fields and stubbles - often in small parties, outside the breeding season. It has a pleasant but weak song of short twirling notes. The bird sings mostly from a hillock. While displaying in spring "Aqqiya" flutters a lot in the air at a height of a few feet and comes down with a soft whistle but stops as soon as it touches the ground.

A saucer-shaped nest is made of fine grass.














AN EVENING AT PASHAN LAKE, POONA

By

Mr. Thomas Gay.

I scanned the lake from end to end. And there they were, scattered over a patch of weedy water swelling here and there into a small mud-flat, away beyond a long stretch of tall reeds. My powerful binoculars showed me Cotton Teal and Common Pochard for certain, and probably other kinds too; about 100 in all, with dozens of Coot paddling and diving busily among them. I walked down to the reeds, leaving my children to start their game of cricket, or get tea ready, as they preferred.

A Bay-backed Shrike flew to the top of a thorn bush. Red Wattled Lapwings, eyeing me warily, moved out of my path on mincing feet. Beside them, a lone Blue Pigeon took off in typical fashion, as though it had just remembered an important engagement. Passing an inlet of the lake, I stood transfixed by the gorgeous colouring of a pair of Purple Moorhens, trampling the edge of a reed-bed in slow motion, and floodlit by the westering sun. A Jungle Crow called harshly from a babbul tree behind me. The ground fell away towards the long reed patch, which I entered to the protests of a Reed Warbler, and now I could no longer see the open water.

I forced my way through the reeds as silently as I could, noting with relief that the muddy water did not come much above my ankles, until the stems thinned sufficiently to show me the blobs of white, black and brown still well ahead. I raised the binoculars, looked through the last row of stems, and began to count the duck. There were 112 of them, and whereas the drakes could be identified with certainty, the females were a little bewildering. It would not be far out, I thought, to say "50 Cotton Teal, 45 Common Pochard, and 14 Common Teal"; about the three magnificent Pintail-drakes there could be no doubt at all. Among the duck bobbed a Dabchick or two, as well as large numbers of Coot which there was no purpose in counting. Away up the lake were Egret, but I had eyes only for the duck.

At last I tore myself away, to go on duty as third fielder. Cricket on a tussocky pitch is a lively game, and we were soon hungry enough for tea and sandwiches beneath a gnarled old mango tree on the bank of a dried-up rice-field. Now the air was full of Redrumped Swallows, with an occasional Pariah Kite floating lazily above. Red-vented Bulbuls flitted along a thorny hedge, and a King-crow surveyed his domain as he balanced on the top of a babhul. Ring-doves flew down and picked industriously in the rough grass. Large Grey Babblers shouted "Creaky-creaky" to each other.



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Suddenly I became aware of a bird flying from behind me towards a hedge on the further side of our field. I recognized the dipping flight of a woodpecker; but when the bird settled on a thin horizontal spray of a babhul, exactly like a dove, I thought I must be mistaken. But I wasn't; the binoculars showed it to be a Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpecker. And there it sat for several minutes, with a self-conscious look that seemed to say, "I know that woodpeckers are not supposed to sit like this, but I'm going to do it, all the same."

There was still one more treat in store. A flock of some forty Red Amadavats, came over the field like wind-blown leaves, and settled beside some Brahminy Mynas among the grass-tufts beyond an earthen bank. I stalked them carefully, and got close enough to be thrilled by the cocks' astounding crimson heads and breasts. And in a few minutes the air grew chill; the sun had gone; and suddenly it was an almost birdless world.

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#### NOTES AND COMMENTS

We reported in the January issue that the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India, the "owners" of this Newsletter, have decided to become members of the International Council for Bird Preservation. A remittance of £5/= has now been sent, and the President's letter dealing with important matters of conservation, and circulated twice or thrice during the year has been received. National Sections of the I.C.B.P. are operating in 58 countries, and in India the Section is headed by Dr. Salim Ali.

The September '66 President's Letter, mentions among other things the XIV World Conference of the ICBP and says: "The XIV World Conference of the ICBP was held in Cambridge, England from July 11-15, 1966 and was attended by representatives of 31 different countries. A large range of subjects were discussed including the urgent problems of the effect of toxic chemicals on bird life, and also oil pollution of the sea and pollution of rivers and inland waters. That the decrease of birds of prey is a world problem was only too clearly proved. Many species are in a serious plight especially those at the end of a long food chain. Fish-eating species are particularly vulnerable to the effects of toxic chemicals and their loss of fertility seems evident.

The question of the artificial re-introduction of indigenous species to places where they have been extirpated by man brought out varying points of view, but the President emphasized that this is a question with which National Sections must concern themselves, give advice, and if necessary intervene.

A full report on threatened species showed that much data are lacking concerning many of them. It was therefore resolved to enlist the aid of zoological and educational institutions throughout the world to co-operate in surveys and studies on the status and biology of these birds.

The danger of bird ringing by unskilled and unqualified persons and the need to control the use of mist nets were discussed and recommendations adopted.

In dealing with the problems of birds which are a menace to other species, and in particular the Herring Gull, which has been a great problem both in the Netherlands and Germany for the last decade, the Netherlands Section reported that there had been such a dramatic decrease in this species during the last few years that control is no longer necessary.

At a special meeting of the Executive Board of the European Continental Section a Working Committee was set up to study the possibilities of improving the International Convention for the Protection of Birds 1950, with a view to enabling those countries which have been prevented for various reasons from ratifying the Convention to do so.

At the conclusion of the meeting resolutions concerning the main subjects discussed and a number of recommendations on specific problems were adopted. It was also agreed to send letters from the Conference to Governments and other appropriate authorities on 11 different questions concerning individual countries."

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A remittance of \$3 has also been sent to the IUCN, so that our club is now a FRIEND of IUCN. The IUCN issues a quarterly Bulletin and extracts will be reproduced in our Newsletter from time to time. The July-September '66 issue contains an interesting yet a sad account of the Keoladeo Ghana Sanctuary, Rajasthan:

"The abundance and variety of birds and mammals, the easy visibility of the wildlife, the accessibility of the sanctuary throughout the year and its proximity to major tourist centers, all combine to make Keoladeo Ghana unique among India's reserves. It is, therefore, distressing to read of a number of serious problems which affect the sanctuary so adversely as to cause grave concern for its future. These include high domestic livestock density and the resultant overgrazing and trampling which has severely damaged the vegetation. In some areas, particularly the eastern and northern parts, the grass cover has been almost completely removed, leaving only bare soil ..... Some of this human activity also adversely affected the vegetation. For example, although the Forest Department has licensed only 36 Wood collectors to remove dead wood from the reserve, as many as 15 illegal loads of wood were seen leaving the sanctuary in one evening. Wood collectors were also observed in 1965 to break down growing trees for firewood; in 1966 many of them used axes to fell living trees. The problems of Keoladeo Ghana confront most other sanctuaries of India to a greater or lesser degree. The task of preserving a remnant of the unique fauna of the country lies with the present generation. It cannot be too often reiterated that the sanctuaries of India with the wealth of wild animals and plants which they contain are irreplaceable and as much a part of the nation's heritage as the Taj Mahal and the ruins of Khajuraho."

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#### CORRESPONDENCE

##### Crow eating its feather:

At 5-30 p.m. on the 9th of March, a crow perched about 5 feet away from me on the windowsill of the Bird Gallery of the Bombay Natural History Society. While I was thinking what a pleasant change it was to see a live bird so close after a day with dead skins it started behaving in a curious way. With the feet on the sill, the crow would bend down laboriously and get a primary or secondary feather in its bill. It would then move the foot on that side very clumsily and get the middle of the feather under the foot. It would then tear a bit of the wing and eat it. This behaviour was repeated for about five minutes alternating between the two sides. It must have removed considerable parts of its wing feathers this way as was evident from the denuded appearance of the primaries and secondaries. After five minutes of feather-eating the crow tried to fly up but lost balance and fell down on the museum ground. I watched it move about very clumsily for about 2 minutes on ground attempting to fly but not succeeding. It was also pecking at paper, dead leaves and cotton wool from a heap

of refuse when I sat down to write this note. It could not have been on ground for long, as I could not see it anywhere in the compound after finishing this note. Had this bird accidentally swallowed some poisonous chemical which temporarily removed the normal inhibitions necessary to limit preening activities within a required level?

D.N. Mathew  
Bombay.

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#### Bird Books:

I am most grateful to Mr. K. Nanu Nair for taking the trouble to comment so kindly, in the last issue of the Newsletter, on my recent article on bird books. Writing such articles is a dreadful swot, but it is worthwhile if someone reads them with pleasure.

In the first paragraph of the article I mentioned, in passing, reproductions of the illustrations of John Gould. In so far as this implies that Gould executed all the plates for which he is famous, it is a misleading statement, and the truth is sufficiently interesting, I think, for a correction to be published. In his introduction to Audubon's American Birds (Batsford, 1949), Mr. Sacheverell Sitwell describes Audubon and Gould as the 'authors, artists, promoters of the two greatest series of illustrated bird books in existence'. However, it is interesting to learn from Mr. Sitwell that unlike Audubon Gould was 'not, except in a very few instances, the artist responsible for his own illustrations'. 'These were drawn by his wife, who died young; by Edward Lear (the nonsense poet), one of the most magnificent of all ornithological draftsmen, who drew, especially, parrots, owls, and cranes; and by William Hart, who helped Gould in the production of his plates for more than forty years.'

R.A. Stewart Melliush  
Holloway's Cottage,  
19, Casamajor Road, MADRAS 8.

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#### Flamingos at Kapurwadi Tank near Ahmednagar:

In the Newsletter of October 1964, Vol.4 No. 10, I mentioned the presence of Flamingos at Kapurwadi during the month of July. The visit of flamingos to this area in the same period is now confirmed. It seems that Kapurwadi is a favourite place of flamingos during the rainy season and in winter.

This year I have been observing the winter visitors of Kapurwadi tank, though this is a draught year for Ahmednagar, and its surrounding area.

During the last fortnight of December 1966, I observed flamingos in varying numbers. The period for which flamingos remained here in winter is comparatively more than the rainy season and the party was also of good number. This party was of two adults and the varying number of young ones from 4 to 7.

My observations are as:-

<u>Day.</u>	<u>Date.</u>	<u>No. of Young.</u>	<u>Adults.</u>	<u>Total</u>
Thursday	22.12.1966	2	-	2
Monday	26.12.1966(Morn.)	3	-	3

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<u>Day.</u>	<u>Date.</u>	<u>No. of Young.</u>	<u>Adults.</u>	<u>Total.</u>
Tuesday	27.12.1966	4	2	6
Wednesday	28.12.1966	7	2	9
Saturday	31.12.1966	3	2	5
Sunday	1. 7.1966	3	2	5
Monday	9. 7.1966	3	2	5

The young ones differ from the adults in their size, colouration and in their resting position.

Young Flamingos: These are mostly whitish in colour all over the body with the exception of beak and most of the primaries which are black in colour while the legs are with reddish colouration. They have the height of 20 to 22 inches excluding the neck.

The young ones always move in pairs and also feed side by side in a company in the shallow waters. I never saw these birds in the mid of tank or any spot round about the greater depth of water.

These birds feed invariably in shallow waters and never feed on one spot. These are constantly in search of food and walk in the water so slowly that their reflection gets less disturbed. During feeding, the neck movements are similar with the trunk of elephant. Once, if the bird locates the area of food, then it starts feeding, finish the material from the spot within a minute or two and again move for the next spot. While feeding they have their necks and heads bend down in such a position, that the upper mandibles rest on the ground and then feed.

These young birds get engrossed so deeply in their feeding that I could go as near as 50 feet and observe them and make a rough pencil sketch.

Flamingos can walk easily on the muddy banks. When these birds are not engaged in feeding, they keep the neck close to the body in the form of 'S' shape. I never saw these birds running or swimming. Flying is another mode of locomotion. During flight neck and legs form a straight line and the wings beat at right angles to it. The wing beats are of moderate speed as the distance to cover then was short. While landing these birds are unable to hold themselves immediately on one spot but they are to run the distance of 10-15 feet and then stop.

Adult Flamingos: These differ in general from the young ones in height and colouration. The height is about 30 to 32 inches. The colour is rosy or scarlet at the beak, wing covers and primaries. The tip of the beak and primaries is black. I could not observe the adults during their feeding and walking. These were either at rest or sleeping whenever I went to Kapurwadi tank.

The adult flamingos stand on one leg during their rest or sleep while the neck is bent back and the head is kept under the wing, especially under the right wing. I could sketch this position of the adult too.

Resting position of the young ones is different from the adults and these young birds stand on both the legs even when these are at rest.

It seems that one of the adults also work as a guard for the party, because one of the adults use to look around the area every few minutes. At this time the neck was in an 'S' shape position for this short period. After taking a short survey, it then inserted its

head within the wings as usual.

I could not take the exact date of the departure of these birds but during my next visit to Kapurwadi the 15th January 1967. there was not a single flamingo in the shallow waters of the tank.

B.J. Dangre  
Ahmednagar.

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Zafar Futehally  
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers  
32-A Juhu Lane  
Andheri, Bombay 58-AS.

# NEWSLETTER

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A LINNAEAN ALPHABET

By

R. A. Stewart Melliush

It is unsatisfactory to be making constant reference to the Linnaean names of birds without having any idea of their significance or the meanings of their components. Even a little knowledge of these things not only makes the names much more useful but adds yet another facet to the pleasure of ornithology. I recently felt this very strongly and so began to compile a few notes, some of which follow. In these I am obviously doing nothing more than scratching the surface of the subject, but they do reveal some of its possibilities. For the purpose of this article I have merely taken one or two names beginning with each letter of the alphabet, and explored them to see what happens. The selection is not entirely random, though: I have chosen words that excited my curiosity. Some names look, and are, dull; others, either by sight or by sound, exercise a kind of enchantment, and demand investigation.

As typed below, words in capitals are Linnaean names; those underlined are Greek unless I have said they are something else. Verbs have been quoted in the first person singular of the present indicative, but translated as infinitives. The first time a word is mentioned I have marked the long vowels in it, if any, with a superior line. Nothing much is to be achieved by offering any further aids to the pronunciation of classical words, because to pronounce them as their original users did is neither necessary nor possible. It is a help, though, to distinguish long and short vowels. I would only add that ch in Greek words cannot reasonably be sounded as in 'church'; it probably ought to be 'kh', like the hawking noise people make before they spit, but is generally and acceptably passed off in contemporary English speech (the French and German practice would be different) as 'k' (cp. chloropsis, shrysanthemum).



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Most of the names I have listed are generic, but as they are singular in form I have translated them into the singular, or else avoided the awkwardness of this by introducing the word genus.

ACRIDOTHERES, the name of a genus of mynas, is a compound formed from akris (stem akrid-), locust, and therao, to hunt or chase. Similarly ARACHNOTHERA is one who hunts the spider, arachnes.

AETHOPYGA, sunbird. aithō is to burn or blaze, and aithōn means fiery, blazing or, of metals, flashing, glittering. Cp. Ethiopia, which is the land inhabited by Aithiopees (aithon plus ops, face), men whose faces are burnt by the sun. puge means rump or buttocks: the same word occurs in PYGARGUS, the specific name of the Montagu's Harrier, which has a white rump (argos, gleaming, white).

AETHOPYGA and PYGARGUS are so spelt, in spite of the spelling of their Greek originals, because almost all Linnaean names are latinized, and the Romans turned the Greek ai into ae, (usually) u into y and the ending -os into -us.

The sunbirds' vivid coloration is reflected in two of their specific names as well as the generic one: IGNICAUDA is from the Latin words ignis, fire, and cauda, tail; and saturata is Latin for richly dyed or saturated with colour.

BUCEROS, hornbill. Horned like an ox, or cow. From bous, an ox, and keras, a horn. In the family BUCCONIDAE, the stone curlews, it is the birds' noses or beaks which are supposed to be ox-like: the word is rhīs, which has a stem rhīn-. Cp. rhinoceros.

CHARADRIUS, plover. charasso is to cleave or cut into furrows, and charadra is a stream which cuts itself a furrow down the side of a mountain, hence also the bed of a gully or ravine itself. The word 'character' has the same origin: it is an engraved or impressed mark. The charadriine birds are so-called because some of them inhabit the beds of streams.

CHRYSOCOLAPTēs is a fine-sounding name for the golden-backed woodpecker. chrysos means golden, and a kolaptēs is one who pecks or chiseals at something: kolaptō is the verb, and kolaptēr is a carpenter's chisel. But if I kolaphizō someone I box his ears.

DELICHON, used of the house-martin, sounds as if it were Greek, but it isn't, and seems to have been invented fairly recently. Mr. Macleod, in his admirable book entitled A Key to the Names of British Birds (Fitman), says it is simply an anagram of the name of the closely-related swallow, CHELIDON. (CHELIDON has also been corrupted to provide a name for a genus of terns or sea-swallows, CHLIDONIAS.)

One of our representatives of the genus CHARADRIUS mentioned above is DUBLUS, the Little Ringed Plover. dubius has several meanings in Latin, but one which suits this bird very well is 'moving in two directions alternately', as if dubious of the better path. If the ornithologist who chose this name for the species did so for some other reason, the ambiguity was a happy accident indeed.

( To be continued )

\* \* \* \* \*

By

K.K. Neelakantan

A few weeks ago a Trivandrum newspaper reported an interesting case of incendiarism. A crow, it was alleged, had stolen a burning wick from an oil lamp, carried it to the top of a thatched roof and set fire to the house. At first I dismissed it as another newspaper yarn, as one cannot imagine a crow flying even a few feet with a burning wick, limp and oil-soaked, without getting badly singed by the flame that would be swept back as the bird flew. The theft of a wick from a lamp that is not lit would not be "news"; and if a 'crow' carried a burning wick some distance and placed it on a roof, it would be no crow but a poltergeist. That was how I looked at it. But then I recalled a series of interesting articles by Dr. Maurice Burton, in THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS, dealing with a very similar subject. He had found R.S.R. Fitter, in his NATURAL HISTORY OF LONDON, quoting with wry humour, a hoary legend that some of the notorious fires of London had been caused by birds carrying live coals to roof-tops. Dr. Burton was not inclined to laugh at this old story because he had a tame jackdaw named Corbie which had a real mania for burning matches and lighted cigarettes.

When Dr. Burton laid a handful of straw in the cage and set fire to it, Corbie at once carried off some of the burning straw and went into ecstasies over it - i.e. it "anted" with the burning straw. Dr. Burton says that the bird seemed to be immune to the flames. Often he had also observed it passing a burning match under its wings, and rubbing the glowing end of a cigarette into the feathers.

Dr. Burton says that some other birds in his aviary reacted to smoke, fire, lemon-peel, moth-rings, raisins, hot ash, ant cocoons etc., in the same way. All this leads him to survey the literature on 'anting'. He examines the various theories and finds most of them inadequate. One of the theories is that some birds - even sophisticated Western ones! - are as fond of fire-walking as Indian holy-men. Dr. Burton does not accept the widely held view that birds 'ant' in order to get rid of ectoparasites. He found that birds free from such parasites were more addicted to 'anting' than "lousy" ones.

In the final article (December 7, 1957) he writes: "My guess is .. that anting.. represents a posture assumed at the height of excitement, and it is normally associated with stimulation of the taste-buds primarily by heat or the impression of heat. If this hypothesis is correct it would mean that the anting posture is not an innate reaction to ants, and it would mean that ants, per se, have little to do with it." The NEW DICTIONARY OF BIRDS (1964) by Landsborough Thomson states that "the evidence points to its being a feather-cann activity." Dr. Burton's hypothesis appears to ignore the fact - repeatedly observed by him - that his birds passed lighted matches under their wings. If the effect of fire and the other substance employed for anting is on the taste-buds, why should birds apply these to the underwing?

Most of Dr. Burton's first-hand observations relate to a jackdaw, a crow, and a jay living in his aviaries. If I remember right, the observations of H.R. Ivor (summarised in an article in the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE) were also based mostly on captive birds. (For Dr. Burton's article see the ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS of July 16, July 23, and October 22, of 1955; July 21, 1956 and December 7, 1957.)

These essays make one wonder why there are few records of Indian birds 'anting' over fire and smoke or using cigarette-stubs, lemon-peel etc. This is remarkable considering the profusion of smouldering cigarette stubs, open fires, burning garbage etc. around our homes, on our roads, railway platforms and maidans. Not a day passes without my seeing heaps of garbage

burning somewhere on the way, and I have got quite used to the sight of bare-footed pedestrians suddenly leaping into the air after stepping on a smouldering cigarette. Invariably there are crows and mynas all over the place, but I have yet to see any bird anting with a cigarette, at a fire or in smoke. Crows and common mynas I tempted with burning cigarette stubs have shown nothing but disgust. By flinging out slices of coconut or other edible stuff which could be a colorable imitation of cigarette stubs and then suddenly throwing a cigarette stub, I have discovered that a crow can distinguish between edible things and the fag-end, even from great distances. It has never swooped down even to examine the cigarette. I have lighted fires out in the open where crows and mynas were present, but they either flew away or just ignored what should have been an ideal opportunity to rid themselves of ectoparasites or of stimulating their taste-buds!

However, we should feel happy that Indian crows and mynas are seldom tempted to play with fire. If they were to develop thermophily and pyromania to the extent to which Dr. Burton's jackdaw, crow and pet jay appear to have done, the Indian country side and our urban slums would always be ablaze.

Are birds living in a cold climate more prone, naturally, to seek warmth? Or do they find their normal diet so bland that they welcome every chance to titillate their taste-buds? Or could it be that birds in captivity take to various forms of anting to relieve the boredom of the cage, as modern youth in an affluent society is said to relieve its boredom by resorting to drugs? Fortunately Indian youth has so far been as well-behaved in this respect as the Indian crows!

The article on anting in the NEW DICTIONARY OF BIRDS supports the view that only captive birds use substances other than ants for anting. It says that some individuals, "particularly those in captivity or other unnatural environment, come to use inappropriate 'substitutes' which have some basic character or characters in common with ants. Such substitutes include smoke, moth-balls, cigarette ends, citron fruits and insects other than ants."

I hope this note will not make the I.C.A.R. seek to strengthen its arguments in favour of crow-slaughter by saying, "CATCH THAT CROW before it destroys our slums and shacks".

\* \* \* \* \*

## SOCIAL LIFE

By

Mrs. Jamal Ara

Much has been written about the social life of insects like the bees and the ants, but the social life of birds has remained unpublicized. There are, ofcourse, no queens, no drones, and no slaves either, in birdland, but birds have social habits, and some of them nest in colonies, birds of several species hunt together in mixed hunting parties, one helping the other. Salim Ali, one of the travellers into the Indian birdland, who has chronicled his experiences eloquently in his "Book of Indian Birds", says: "Just as you begin to despair you may round a bend in the path and suddenly find yourself confronted by a gathering that well nigh includes every species of the neighbourhood! There are birds on every hand: on the ground, among the bushes, on the trunks of the lofty trees and in the canopy of leaves high overhead. There are tits, babblers and tree pies, woodpeckers, nuthatches and drongos, flycatchers, minivets, and tree warblers and others besides. These mixed assemblages are a characteristic of our forests, both hill and plain. Here birds do not as a rule spread themselves out uniformly, but rove about in cooperative bands of mixed species in more or less regular daily circuits. All the

members of the association profit through the coordinated efforts of the lot. Babblers rummaging amongst the fallen leaves for insect-food disturb a moth which is presently swooped upon and captured in mid air by a drongo on the look-out hard by. A woodpecker scuttling up a tree trunk in search of beetle galleries stampedes numerous winged insects resting upon the protectingly coloured bark or linking within its crevices. These are promptly set upon by a vigilant flycatcher or warbler and so on".

This cooperative hunting by various tribes of the birdland is an achievement of social organization. The birds do not spread themselves out uniformly as in open country, because in the dim light of the forest the insects are very well concealed by protective colouring and if each bird were to search for its food by itself it may not get enough sustenance. In the roving together the maximum food is obtained at a great economy of effort.

Social breeding in the bird land is usually of members of the same species nesting in one tree or the same locality. However, there are instances of birds of different species cooperatively nesting on the same tree. The Black-headed Orioles, and some other mild-mannered birds as doves and babblers often build in the same tree as holds a nest of the Black Drongo. By this means the milder birds enjoy a degree of protection against nest robbers like crows and tree-pies. The Drongo will tolerate the proximity of his harmless dependents with complacency, but a crow or a tree-pie has only to show himself in the precincts of the nest tree to be furiously set upon and beaten off by the Drongo. In recognition of such duties the Drongo is unknown throughout the Deccan by the name of "Kotwal" or Policeman, and surely this is the strangest vocation among birds the world over.

Except for nest robbers and birds of prey crime is an insignificant factor in life in the bird land. There are a few delinquents like the Rosy Pastor who occasionally gets drunk and the various cuckoos who shirk the drudgery of incubation and rearing up of children and lay their eggs in the nest of other birds. The dupes rear the young interlopers which soon after hatching kill a few rightful chicks. One cuckoo with a forked tail uses the resemblance to the Black Drongo to be parasitic upon the policeman of bird land himself!

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### WHITESPOTTED FANTAIL FLYCATCHER

By

Zafar Futehally

On the 1st of April the newly born Whitespotted Fantail Flycatchers were just three blobs of flesh, quite unsightly with the black skin shutting out their eyes and with nothing to indicate that they had anything in common with the graceful parents which were flying around. It seemed to me then that the parents themselves were not too infatuated with their offspring for I went within two feet of the nest on several occasions for a look and I was neither attacked nor scolded. After a week on the morning of the 7th the situation had radically transformed. The three chicks looked most alluring, with the white eyestripe quite prominent, the body well covered with down and wing feathers, the eyes, very much open, and the parents definitely unhappy about my being close to the nest. The three young are spilling over the sides of the nest, and I cannot understand how they will be accommodated for the next few days, if they grow at the rate they have been doing.

Both parents feed the young. I was interested to see whether the three were fed by turns and during the ten minutes I observed them today, this was definitely done: The feeding cycle being 1 2 3, 1 2 3.

The nest is on an Ixora, just 4 feet from the ground, and alongside the wall of our house. The overhanging branches of mango trees are full of crows, and if this family survives their wicked intentions it will be a tribule to the fighting qualities of the adult Flycatchers. They can be pretty vicious when the survival of their progeny is involved.

8/4/67: Saw the three youngsters sitting erect in the nest at 10-00 A.M. One of the parents flew close to me and scolded me quite loudly.

21/4/67: The young chicks are now fairly grown and I have become persona non grata with the family. The adults keep me away from getting too close to the young. The three chicks are still being fed by the parents but have grown sufficiently mobile and strong to avoid becoming an easy morsel for crows.

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#### NOTES AND COMMENTS

During the last outing of the Club at Tulsi lake on 19th March, members were fairly agitated at the impudence and unconcern with which head loads of wood, from trees freshly cut were being taken away. A suggestion was made that a delegation from our Club and others interested in the outdoors should wait on the Chief Minister. The Honorary Secretary wrote to the Chief Minister as follows:

"Unauthorised, large-scale cutting of trees continues in Tulsi forest, and in view of the importance of this area for our city, a delegation of members of the Bombay Natural History Society, the Birdwatchers Field Club of India, and the Friends of Trees would like to call on you to discuss the possible ways in which the situation can be saved.

This area of forest surrounding our drinking water lakes, has to be preserved to prevent lakes from silting up, to induce precipitation of rains during the monsoon, to maintain the interesting complex of birds and animals which exists here, to preserve a fine laboratory for naturalists and a splendid recreation area where thousands of citizens enjoy themselves during the weekends. All that the Authorities need to do is to prevent the trees from being cut and to preserve the area from unauthorised exploitation in any way. It must be stated with regret, that in spite of several representations made by the Society and others in the past, the Authorities have not taken any effective steps to bring this.

Since the issue transcends in scope the jurisdiction of the Minister of Forests, and since it involves a basic decision of the land use of an area, we are writing to you.

The delegation would like to impress upon you the vital importance of taking strong and urgent measures to prevent further denudation of the forest, and to offer suggestions about how this could be done by the Authorities with assistance from voluntary organisations.

May I request you to give us a suitable time during the next fortnight to meet you about this very important matter. "

The PA to the Chief Minister wrote to say that the CM was too busy at the moment, and "he desires that we should first see the Minister of Forests". A letter has been addressed to the Minister of Forests, to which there is as yet no reply. Members in their individual capacities, through the press, and contact with officials are requested to pursue this matter with the energy which the cause deserves. It is gratifying to note that NJN in his 'Sunday Soliloquies' of 16th April spoke up strongly for this representation for Tulsi, made by our Club.

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Birds of Assam

Ever since I read the November Newsletter I have been meaning to write and say how interested I was in Mr. Pratap Singh's article on the birds in Assam and the Naga Hills. As you know, I was in Assam for many years, and though I never could go up to the Naga Hills, I did go more than once to Garampani, the Kaziranga and Manas Sanctuaries, to Darang, to Shillong and Sonapahar in the Khasi Hills, to tea gardens in Upper Assam, and to Forest Reserves in Kamrup. As Mr. Singh so rightly says, it is a most exciting area for birdwatching! I did not see all the birds he writes about, but perhaps he would be interested to hear where our observations coincided! Reading through his list:-

1. Fishing Eagles. There were many Ringtailed up and down the Brahmaputra round Gauhati, the Manas and Garampani. I also saw the Lesser Fishing Eagle in the Kamrup Forests.
2. Crested Serpent Eagle. Often seen in Kamrup District.
3. Black Eagle I do not think I ever saw this, but I am not very strong on eagles! I have notes on Ospreys.
4. Brahminy Kite Seen in all areas.
5. Shikra In our Gauhati garden
6. Barred Owlet Heard and seen in our Gauhati garden
7. Pigmy Owlet Heard only, in our garden
8. Pied Harrier Seen in fields in Kamrup
9. Long-tailed Nightjar Both heard and seen in Kamrup. The call was "chouk - chouk", so from Smythies' summary P. 370 I agree with Mr. Singh's identification.
- 10-12 Swifts I watched house Swifts nesting in Shillong and Palm Swifts round Burnihat, and both overhead from my garden, where there may well have been other varieties intermingling.
13. Bee-eaters I saw Blue-bearded Bee-eaters in Kamrup jungle, in Garampani, occasionally in my garden and in tea gardens in Jorhat. Other Bee-eaters seen were the Blue-tailed Chestnut-headed and Common Green.
14. Hornbills. Large Pied in Garampani, and in Kamrup Forests. Also the Great and the Grey in Kamrup forests and the Manas.
- 15-16 Barbets The Great was only heard in Kamrup forest and Sonapahar, but I heard and saw one in Garampani. Other barbets common to all areas are the Blue-throated, Lineated, and, of course, the Coppersmith.
- 18-21 Woodpeckers The Lesser Yellow-naped can be seen in Kamrup jungle, Sonapahar, Garampani, and, once, in my garden. The Pied and the Golden-backed are in all areas. I did not spot the Rufous and the Pigmy!
22. Large Cuckoo-shrike. In all areas. The Lesser seen only occasionally.
23. Scarlet Minivet In all areas. Jordon's, once, in my garden.

24. Chloropsis The Orange-bellied In Garampani, as well as one I couldn't identify. The Gold-fronted can be seen in all areas.
25. Fairy Bluebird In Kamrup forests, Garampani and the Manas.
- 26-31 Bulbuls I did not see the Olive Bulbul. I saw the black in Shillong, Kamrup jungle, Sonapahar, Darang, and the Black-crested Yellow in Kamrup, Darang and my garden. The Brown White-throated was in Darang, Kamrup forest, the Manas, and Garampani. The Red-whiskered and Red-vented are common.
- 32-38 Flycatchers No Ferruginous, but the Grey-headed and Red-breasted come to the Kamrup forests and my garden in winter, and I saw both in Garampani in March and in Sonapahar in April. The Red-breasted was in Shillong in September. The Verditer is common there, and a rare winter visitor in my garden in Gauhati - the Black-naped Monarch likewise. Both seen in Garampani and Manas in March and April.
39. Babblers. I was interested in Mr. Singh's description of the Brown, and wish I could have another look at the ones I thought were Jungle Babblers. I saw or heard Quaker, Spotted and Striped in Kamrup Jungle, and the Scimitar in Garampani.
40. Laughing Thrushes I did not have the luck to see the White-crested, but I did see the Rufous-necked in Sonapahar, and the Neck-laced in Garampani.
41. Rock Thrushes I saw the Chestnut-bellied in Shillong and the Blue in my Garden once, and more frequently in Sonapahar, Umtru and Garampani.
43. Sibias. I am in confusion over Sibias! I thought I saw the Grey Sibia in Shillong, Garampani and Sonapahar - and the Chestnut-backed in Sonapahar.
44. Tits The Green-backed are in Shillong, the Yellow-cheeked there and in Sonapahar, and the Sultan in Garampani.
45. Silver-eared Mesia Seen once in Shillong.
46. Red-starts The Black Redstart was in my Gauhati garden in April '65 and there was no sign of white on the wing.
47. Colored Bush Chat I saw them in Garampani in December and April, and in winter from Kamrup roads, and in Kaziranga.
- 50-51 Shrikes The Black-headed was in Garampani in December and in Sonapahar in January. The Tibetan comes to my Gauhati garden, Shillong, Kamrup Forests, together with the Brown, in winter.
- 53-56 Drongos The Racket-tailed is in the Kamrup forest. The Hair-crested Ashy, Bronze and Black are in all areas.
- 57-58 Cinnamon Tree-sparrow Spotted in Shillong.
- 59 Tree-pie I thought it was the Rufous that I saw.
60. Mrs Gould's Yellow-backed Sunbird I have copious notes on this bird, having only once seen the yellow back in spite of it being very common in Gauhati!

61. Imperial Pigeon    Seen in Garampani and the Manas.
63. Green Pigeons     Shikari friends produced the Thick-billed and the Yellow-footed, identified in Smythies.
64. Rufous Turtle-dove    Seen and heard in Gauhati garden, Sonapahar, and Kamrup Forest.
66. Kalij Pheasant.    I did not examine it as closely as Mr. Singh but saw it in Upper Assam, Kamrup forest, Manas, Sonapahar, Kaziranga.

My notes cover many other species, not mentioned above, but I am already appalled at the amount of space I have taken up! I wish I could compare them with Mr. Singh. Incidentally, I would like to add that I also enjoyed Mr. Melluish's article on Bird Books in the December issue, and endorse his mention of the usefulness of Smythies Birds of Burma. It was invaluable in Assam and I do not know what I would do without it now, in the Terai'.

Maureen Thom

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Some bird notes from Bhubaneswar, Orissa.

On February 8, my wife and I saw a small flock (consisting of perhaps a dozen individuals) of the Black-throated Weaverbird (Floceus benghalensis) about six miles south of Bhubaneswar and a third of a mile west of the Puri Road. About half of the time that we saw the birds, they were on some Ipomea sp. (carnea?) that formed the border between a sizable marsh on the west and a dried-up paddy field on the east. The rest of the time, the birds were in the vicinity of the spiked bushes that I think are some Agave sp. These bushes divided segments of the dried-up paddyfield.

The birds of the marsh, which lies near a fishery project, are remarkable in several respects. But if Salim Ali, Ripley, and Whistler are quite precise in their statements of the distribution of Floceus benghalensis, the occurrence of the flock in this area is probably the most noteworthy of the marsh's features.

We regret that the marsh is not one of the places we can visit every day, and that we therefore do not know whether the flock had been there for some time, or even whether it is still there. We also regret that because Mr. S.D. Jayakar is not presently in Bhubaneswar, we could not ask him to confirm our sight-record.

On March 7, in the neighbourhood of the Bhubaneswar Airport, I noticed a Common Myna (Acridotheres tristis) whose "head" or "hood" appeared not the usual black, but entirely yellow. Once before, in Poona, I had seen a Common Myna of similar appearance. The bird in Poona was on a rock in the Mula-Mutha River some distance from me, while I was on the bundh near the Bundh Garden; and I did not have binoculars with me. So I could not tell what gave rise to the Poona bird's peculiar appearance.

When I saw the Bhubaneswar bird, I happened to have binoculars with me, and I was able to get within thirty feet of the bird. He had almost no feathers on his head. There was a tuft of black feathers on the right side of his crown. There appeared to be two dark spots where his ear-coverts ought to have been; these spots were probably his ears. He did have feathers on his upper breast, though none any higher than this. But curiously of the feathers on his upper breast, only the lowest (i.e., the ones closest to the abdomen) were black. The uppermost were a pale colour. His "neck" on all sides was unfeathered and pale, not the bright yellow of his head and chin.



Since the bare patch at the eye of an ordinary Common Myna is yellow, I suppose the Bhubaneswar bird was not peculiar in his skin-colour. As the phenomenon of a yellow-headed Common Myna does not seem common, I suppose that the phenomenon does not occur in the course of ordinary moulting. I should of course like to know whether these two suppositions are correct, and also what might account for the Bhubaneswar bird having non-black feathers on his upper breast.

Louis Werner

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### An evening's birdwatching

I am now on my holidays from school, and quite frequently, I go out cycling, and keep my eyes open, noting the birds around. I have seen nothing very unusual, but on each occasion, I see birds which I know and which are commonplace, but each time, they become more familiar, and I find the same interest to watch them. In fact, on each occasion, I seem to get a greater pleasure at watching them because I seem to know more about them, and also because I am finding it easier to look for the interesting facts about them. Here is a small note on a cycle outing I had on the 2nd evening to the salt pans a few miles out from Jamnagar.

On my way out, I first passed a pool of dirty water where there were waders, out of which the Black-winged stilts were present in great numbers, There I also saw a Grey Heron. Riding further, I passed the city refuse dump, and there, I saw my friends the Black Drongos bullying the crows and the kites. It was really interesting to watch many other birds feeding on insects.

At the salt pans, I saw many birds. Unfortunately, it was difficult to identify them as they were quite far out in the shallow water, and I did not have a binocular with me. Atleast, I could recognise the Flamings which were among them. There were a few Common Swallows flying a little above the water. I suspected a Wire-tailed Swallow among the group.

I also saw two Terns (Gull-billed Terns?), and a Gull flying towards the sea. In the distance on the far side of the pans, I could see a large congregation of Flamings which appeared as mere white specks.

As the sun was setting, I returned homeward, and on the way, I saw a vast flock of Rosy Pastors roosting down in a tree. Passing the dirty pool, I saw a White-breasted Kingfisher, and so back home in the gathering dusk.

Kishore Kadiwar  
Standard IX

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### On a peculiar nesting behaviour of Kite

Last December '66 during our usual holiday for bird watching, we came across an incident which seemed to be a very peculiar.

Krishnapur Village is situated 0 4 Kms. east of the city, where mirshy land and salt lake covered a great portion.

In last August we observed a nest of Jungle Crow Corvus macrorhynchos wagler on the top of a big tree of Ficus religiosa Linn. (which is commonly known as Asyotha).

As we were interested to know the breeding, we were keeping a keen watch on that nest in view to study that. But unfortunately a pair of Pariah Kite Milvus migrans Govinda drove them out and occupied the nest in last November '66. That time we observed that they were busy in building, rather reconstructing and repairing that nest which was little damaged in one side.

After this, in our routine visit, as we were keeping a close eye on it saw that they were in possession of that nest. But after few weeks we could not locate them any more nor the original owner and builder. And lastly in the month of December '66, instead of the Pariah Kite we observed few Brahmini Kites were gliding on their wings above and around the tree.

We saw some green twigs etc. they were putting on the nest, as they have occupied the left nest.

Some nursery ponds for fish culture etc. nearby which seemed to be a good source of abundant food for them might have created interest to prefer that place.

I suggest these fish culture ponds have created interest as well as have attracted a number of Brahmini Kite Haliastur indus Boddaert. That abundant source of food has become the target of them. On the contrary those Pariah Kites could not tolerate their presence so they left that area. As that nest was nearby they have preferred it.

H.P. Mukherjee

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Zafar Futchally  
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers  
32-A Juhu Lane,  
Andheri, Bombay 56-AS.

# NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 7 - No. 6 - 1967 June



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A NOTE ON THE GENERA PASSERA  
AND PETRONIA IN WEST PAKISTAN

By

Tom Roberts

The sparrow tribe attract the attention and indeed the affection of anyone interested in birds not only because their sociable and vociferous habits make them obtrusive but also because they may usually be found in association with human habitations and in such a wide variety of country.

Apart from Australasia and the New World where they have been all too successfully introduced, sparrows are found throughout the Ethiopian, Palearctic and Oriental faunal zones, and they tend to be resident in most of these areas. It is, therefore, noteworthy that two species and several races exhibit, strong migratory tendencies in West Pakistan. But before going on to record some of my observations of each species separately it is possible to characterise the two genera in a general way, by saying that all are rather small birds with strong finch-like bills ideally adapted to splitting hard graminaceous seeds. That they tend to be highly gregarious in foraging, particularly in winter, to establish communal nightly roosts, to construct their bulky and untidy nests in holes or crevices, and to be garbed in rather sober browns and greys. All species have conspicuous pale or white tips to the median and greater secondary wing coverts which reveal themselves in two wing bars when at rest.

The genus Montifringilla is closely allied and includes the snow finches which probably don't enter into West Pakistan (Ripley 1962). Certain species of *Passera* are confined to Africa or the immediate Arabian region. But all the other known species of Europe and Asia, are conspicuous at certain times and regions in West Pakistan.

THE COMMON HOUSE SPARROW, Passer domesticus occurs in West Pakistan in three races all of which exhibit varying degrees of migratory tendencies. P.d. indicus is the common house sparrow of the Indus plains and all the Punjab where it does not migrate at all. The male is really quite a dapper gentleman in breeding plumage, having much whiter cheeks and brighter contrasting patches of liver chestnut on the sides of its crown and hind-neck than the European race. Anyone flying from, say Karachi to London, is at once struck by the contrast between the slim pale sparrows at the Air Port of embarkation (typical P.d. indicus) and the much darker and larger sparrows which greet one at the point of disembarkation which belong to the nominate race P.d. domesticus. Even the soot and grime of London and the undoubtedly less clement weather do not account for the sparrow's darker colouring and more puffed-out appearance. It is in one of the larger and more fashionable of Karachi's hotels that this sparrow demonstrates perhaps the most striking feature of the species, that it is truly a commensal of mankind. The fully enclosed dining hall of this hotel has a resident population of sparrows which appear to subsist entirely on the crumbs they glean from around the tables, never venturing for long out into the open and even nesting within the wainscoting ledge near the lofty ceiling. I have watched these sparrows and noted that they are extremely wary and hard to approach, yet will almost hop over the feet of an unsuspecting diner. Their nestlings are obviously reared on a diet of bread rather than the usual one of insects. This is only one typical illustration of other similar situations which the reader will no doubt call to mind showing how perfectly this little bird can and has adapted itself to man's way of life.

I have observed that in the bigger townships of Baluchistan in the summer months, the House sparrow is a common summer visitor and these birds appear to be identical with the race P.d. indicus. In winter they all migrate to the plains and leave the field to their hardier cousins the Tree sparrows. In the northern Himalayan reaches of West Pakistan, two other races of the House sparrow are largely migratory. One race first noticed by Whistler is described as P.d. parkini and is characterised by its larger size- slightly longer wings and generally brighter colouration. I have observed that a few of these hardy birds remain throughout the winter up in Gilgit and Chitral valleys, but the majority migrate to the adjacent plains, preferring to spend the winter in the smaller and more isolated villages. I have seen them in winter in the villages on the edge of cultivation on the border of Bahawalpur desert as well as in the Salt Range. Whistler himself described the birds, which are resident in the Murree Hills and Rawalpindi plateau as being somewhat indeterminate in type between indicus and parkini (Whistler 1938). It is interesting to note that parkini prefers holes for its nesting sites (Bates and Lowther 1952). The other race which is highly migratory, is Passer domesticus bactrianus and it breeds even further north and to the west, in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan (Vaurie 1959). The difference between these two races are very slight in fact and there is even some doubt as to whether they are separable (Ali 1963). But one year, in mid-April, I was motoring through a wild and lonely stretch of northern Baluchistan when I encountered numerous flocks of House sparrows flying from east to west towards the Afghan border. I was particularly struck by their swinging flight and bold turns executed in perfect unison, Examination of a flock of 150 or so which settled in some thorn bushes revealed these to be large House sparrows. With rather restricted black throat patches and very dark chestnut patches in the nape and side of crown, these sparrows undoubtedly belonged to the race bactrianus and were on

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spring passage to their breeding grounds in Afghanistan. A friend of mine working in Sind noticed huge flocks gathering in communal roosts in late March, around Jacobabad and Usta Mohammad Khan in south eastern Baluchistan. These sparrows disappeared at the end of March, and were probably of the same race bactrianus.

THE SPANISH SPARROW - Passer hispaniolensis. This sparrow is resident in the Mediterranean countries where it co-exists with the House sparrow. It is sometimes called the willow sparrow in such countries because of its predilection for damper places and for nesting in pollard willows. In Europe, it is confined to the rural areas, whilst the House sparrow occupies the urban areas. It is a very handsome sparrow with bright white cheeks, a much more prominent white loreal streak and line behind the eyes. Its upper breast is covered with rich black streaks which extend right down its flanks. There is an eastern race formerly known as Tschusi's sparrow which breeds in Turkistan and Transcaspia (Gavrilov 1963). It is highly social or colonial in its nesting habits and migrate into West Pakistan as well as India in winter. I have twice encountered it in the Salt Range a large flock in late October and several small flocks on the borders of Cholistan desert in Bahawalpur in mid-February. It shuns man's dwellings in winter, keeps in flocks and though it feeds in stubble fields and depends upon cultivation, it sticks to open country and keeps well away from villages. It gathers into enormous congregations at the start of its northern migration and travels through the former N.W.F.P. (Whitehead 1909) and Chitral in late March and early April (Fulton 1904). This must be one of their main migration routes; in October lesser numbers are observed passing through Chitral.

TREE SPARROW - Passer montanus. Only one race occurs in West Pakistan, which is distinguished by its very pale colouration. This is a rather shy sparrow which in Europe is confined to the better wooded areas. However, in Asia, it is a bird of the mountains and where the House sparrow offers no competition it is truly commensal with man. It is found through the higher regions of Baluchistan from Mekran right upto Fort Sandeman. I have not noticed it away from villages and human habitation. From April onwards to late November it can and does coexist with the House sparrow but the latter is undoubtedly more aggressive. It is interesting to contrast the very barren treeless hills of Baluchistan with the better wooded areas of Europe which this same species normally prefers. In Lorelai on May 8th I watched Tree sparrows feeding their fully fledged young on the lintel of a house in the heart of the bazaar and have no doubt that they had nested in some crevice between the roof and the wall. Like other members of the genus, both sexes assist in the nest building operations and also in feeding the young before and after they leave the nest. The Tree sparrow does not build its nest in the fork of a tree as the House sparrow occasionally does and the Spanish sparrow invariably does. Up in Chitral, in early June, I have observed the Tree sparrow to be the dominant species in villages of the main valley; exhibiting all the traits of the house sparrow. Foraging in huge flocks and attacking ripening wheat grains and living in the heart of the bazaar. The same race P.m. dilutus occurs in Chitral as in Quetta. It is the only sparrow I know of where both male and female wear identical plumage.

SIND JUNGLE SPARROW - Passer pyrrhonotus. Here we have a sparrow which definitely shuns the proximity of man and his activities, which is resident and non-migratory and more restricted in its world distribution than any other

species of the genus with the exception perhaps of the Dead Sea sparrow (LANDSBOROUGH THOMSON 1964). Its range falls within the Indus plain and the Punjab plain. It may be found particularly where there are a number of trees or fairly thick thorn scrub, usually near water. Thus tree lined canals are its favourite habitat. I have found it in permanently flooded tamarisk and suspect that its feeding habits are markedly different from all the other members of the genus. I have seen it feeding avidly on the young green buds of *Dalbergia Sissoo*. Its nest is also not built in a hole in a tree, but often in some dense thorn thicket or climbing vine. I have seen the parents carrying food to their young on April 25 in an inaccessible vine draped shrub alongside a canal. This pretty little sparrow has a neat and narrow black throat patch which does not extend into the freckled bib of the House sparrow, its upper breast being pale grey. Its call is a higher pitched, more melodious CHILP, than the house sparrow and its most distinctive feature is probably the rich liver-chestnut ear coverts and the pale pinky-chestnut mantle with relatively restricted black shaft streaks on the feathers.

CINNAMON TREE SPARROW - *Passer rutilans*. This is the sparrow of the Himalayas and particularly the better forested areas. It is comparatively uncommon in southern Chitral in the better wooded area but its main stronghold is in Hazara District and the Murree Hills where it even comes into the villages when it does not have to compete with the House sparrow. But normally it retreats before the latter species and is found in forest clearings or on the forest edges of alpine meadows, even up to 10,000 feet. It is shy and retiring compared to the house sparrow, invariably builds its nest in a hole and I have found more sites in tree holes, but in early August one year a pair nested in a crevice of the stone wall of my summer cottage in the Galis (at 8200 feet above Sea level). This was obviously a second brood, as nesting activity in that area commonly starts in late April. In late September it tends to gather into quite large flocks and to descend to the outer hills where bare terraced fields offer food in the form of stubble gleanings. The female has a conspicuous pale creamy supercilium whilst the male is perhaps the brightest of the genus with his orange chestnut crown, nape and upper mantle. In Naran and Battakundi villages in the northern reaches of the Kaghan valley I was surprised to find this shy sparrow was the only species even in the villages and specimens were chirruping on every roof top as well as foraging in the narrow lanes.

The genus *Petronia* contains but two species, both of which are partially migratory and avoid close proximity with man. One species is confined to South East Asia whilst the other breeds in the dryer mountain ranges of both southern Europe and Asia.

THE YELLOW THROATED SPARROW - *Petronia xanthocollis* is a summer visitor to northern Sind and the Punjab, arriving in numbers in all the better wooded districts from early April onwards. It extends right up to the Murree foothills (4000 feet above Sea level) to breed in the early summer. In southern Sind it may be partially residential. They are at once recognizable as sparrows in general appearance, but their bills are much slimmer at the base and more sharply pointed, showing a lesser degree of adaptation to a wholly grain diet. In fact they are extremely fond of ripe mulberries when they first arrive in the region where I live. They are much more arboreal in feeding habits than any of the other sparrows - and rather shun human habitations. As they come to this area to breed,



they remain fairly dispersed, but in parts of India where they winter, they congregate into flocks and feed in the stubble fields. They always nest in holes of trees and I have found several nests in what appear to be abandoned parrots nest holes, in both Tamarisk and Dalbergina trees in late May and even early June.

This is the only sparrow of these two genres in this part of the World which has no streaks on the mantle feathers. Its wings have two very prominent white wing bars and the lesser secondary wing coverts are bright chestnut. The male has a lemon yellow spot on its upper breast (not throat) which is fairly easy to see. It has quite a melodious little song during the breeding season, in contrast to the other sparrows. The race inhabiting this region is P.x. transfuga.

ROCK SPARROW - Petronia petronia intermedia. This bird breeds from Transcaspia to Turkestan, Uzbekistan and northern Afghanistan. In winter it migrates to the outer ranges of the Himalayas and Whistler recorded seeing a flock of 15 on the rocky banks of the Indus as far south as Attock. My only experience of them is in Gilgit main valley in mid-December feeding in stubble fields in mixed flocks with Pine Buntings Common Rose Finches and Meadow Buntings. They were conspicuous by their generally pale sandy colouration, pale superciliary streak and darker median streak on the sides of the crown. Their tails seemed relatively short and their whole build was thick-set and stubby. The yellow throat patch was very difficult to discern. Their bills are much heavier than the other Petronia species and though most books describe this sparrow as shy and avoiding human habitation, I saw it frequently fly up to the walls and roofs of villages houses on the edge of cultivation. They nest usually in holes in the ground or rock crevices, preferring to occupy disused animal burrows.

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A LINNAEAN ALPHABET  
(Continued)

By

R.A. Stuart Melliush

EREMOPHILA is the horned lark. erēma are deserts, and philē means love. The birds of this genus are truly eremites, dwellers in the wilderness. Of E. ALPESTRIS LONGIROSTRIS, alpine and longbilled, which breeds in Kashmir, Bates and Lowther write, 'this is .... one of the desert larks whose main stronghold is amongst the upland plateaux and bare hillsides across the main Himalayan divide .... nothing is to be gained by looking for them on the green grass and bush-dotted hillsides and margs, but only on the bare screes and drier slopes well above the treeline.'

EREMOPTERIX, a genus of finch-larks, contains the same idea of desert compounded with pterux, a wing, hence a bird.

ERITHACUS, which is applied to a large genus of 'flycatchers' including the Nightingale, Rubythroats and Bush Robins, is difficult to account for. Pliny uses it of a bird, but it has evidently not been translated. The very similar word erithacē is bee-bread ('the pollen of flowers collected by bees as food for their young', says Chambers's), or sandarach, which is the resin of the sandarach tree, a Moroccan species of conifer which is powdered to form pounce and used in making varnish. And erithacis is a female day-labourer. Very wide of the mark.

FALCO, falcon. This word is probably from the same root as phalkos, bandylegged, phalkēs, the bent rib of a ship, and falx, which is Latin for a pruning-hook or sickle. The root appears again in the Latin verb flecto, meaning to bend, which has many familiar English derivatives, e.g. flex. The falcons owe their name to the curve of their claws, or is it their beaks?

GELOCHELIDŌN, gullbilled tern. gelāo is to laugh, but if one wished to name a bird 'laughing swallow', happy notion, analogies suggest that the proper form would be gelōtochelidōn. Cognate with gelao, however, (the root is gal, to be bright) are gala, milk (cp. galaxy), and gelō, the Latin for to freeze (which gives us the English word jelly), and it is probable that in GELOCHELIDON we have a milk-white swallow, or one the colour of frost.

Our GELOCHELIDONES are NILOTICA simply because the typical specimens were described from Egypt.

HALCYŌN, kingfisher. This word is the Greek alkuōn. The initial h has been added on the apparently mistaken assumption that the first part of the word comes from hals, sea (cp. HALIASTUR, HALIAETUS). The related Latin word is alcēdo, used of another genus of kingfisher and in the family name. In mythology Alkuon, or Alcione, is the wife of Ceyx, son of the morning star (and yet another kingfisher genus). Ceyx being drowned in a shipwreck, Alcione finds his dead body and is so overcome with grief that the gods take pity on her and metamorphose both her and her dead husband into kingfishers. Alcione and Ceyx make their nests at sea, and the Alcēdōnia is a period of fourteen days during winter when the waves stay calm for the purpose; hence the familiar phrase 'halcyon days', applied to a period of peace and quiet.

ICTHYOPHAGA, the genus of fishing-eagles, is a mis-spelling for ICHTHYOPHAGA, from ichthus, fish, and phagō, to eat. In classical literature the Ichthyophagi were a tribe of men who inhabited the shores of the Arabian Gulf and, one must suppose, ate its fish.

IRENA PUELLA, the Fairy Bluebird, is to my ear a particularly charming name, as long as E in IRENA is rhymed with 'rain'. eirēnē means peace; puella is Latin for a girl.

IXOBRYCHUS, a genus of bittern, is puzzling bruch- is the stem of a verb meaning to roar or bellow, and must denote the bitterns' boom. ixos is mistletoe, or birdlime made from its berry; ixeuō is to catch with birdlime. What should we understand by this compound?

JYNX is the Greek word iungx, meaning wryneck, which was so-called because of its cry; iuzō means to shout or yell with grief or pain. Liddell and Scott's Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon contains the following comment, which I find somewhat obscure: 'The ancient witches used to bind it to a wheel, believing that, as it turned, it drew men's hearts along with it.' Hence the word was used metaphorically of a spell or charm, or a passionate yearning. Pliny suggests that by means of a wryneck and the proper spells unrequited lovers could win the hearts of those they longed for.

KITTA is the only satisfactory K, and in naming the magpie thus modern science has merely borrowed Aristotle's own word. Another form is kissa. kissāō means to crave for strange food, as pregnant women are alleged to do. The idea springs from the greedy false appetite of the bird.

LEPTOPTILOS, adjutant. leptos, fine; ptilos, down.

LONCHURA, the munias' name, describes their tail, oura, which is the shape of a spearhead, longchē.

LYMNOCRYPTES is a fine name, though in fact a mis-spelling of LIMNOCRYPTES. limnē is a mere or marshy pool; and kruptēs is one hidden. It fits the snipe kind admirably, and unfortunately no longer seems to be in use. The Latin CAPELLA, which has replaced it, is a shegoat, or (as a term of abuse) a dirty fellow. The connexion with snipes is tenuous, but it is probably through the star called Capella in the constellation of Auriga, the rise of which the Romans associated with the coming of the rainy season.

MEROPS is the name of the bee-eater genus, but the reason why eludes me. merops is made up of two words, meros meaning half and ops. voice, and itself connotes one who 'divides the voice', that is to say, one who is articulate in speech. I don't understand what this has to do with eating bees.

MOLPASTES was a fine evocative name for the bulbul which is unfortunately now replaced in use by the jejune and ugly PYCNONOTUS. molpastēs is a minstrel or a dancer, molpē the song or dance he performed, from the same root as melody. Though Melpomenē was the Muse of Tragedy, her name means Songstress.

NUMENIUS ARQUATA, the Curlew, is a bird with a bill like the crescent moon or the arc of the rainbow. noumēnia is the first of the month, from neos, new, and mēn, month; hence also the new moon. I am indebted to Mr. Zafar Futehally for bringing this derivation to my notice.

arquata is Latin for arched or arc-shaped. Whoever first applied these names to the Curlew was as much poet as scientist, for it would have been hard to produce a more lyrical or evocative combination. They are fine liquid words, lapped by the ripples of an estuarine meander, and they reflect the sheen of wet mud.

( To be continued)

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## APRIL COMMENTS

By

K.S. Lavkumar

April is a month of expectations; the trees which have lost all their leaves after the strong winds of March, are flushed with a light mantle of green as buds appear ready to burst forth into full foliage immediately the first rains come. Gulmahores or Flamboyant Trees, Coral Trees, and a few late Flames of the Forest are ablaze with orange, red and crimson flowers, Indian Leburnums are a splash of yellow while a white halo surrounds leafless branches of Drumstick Trees. In gardens Jasmins are in full bloom and their white flowers spread a scent into the surrounding air. The Neems are now green and shady and one realises why they are so popularly grown in backyards of rural homes, for just when the summer heat is at its maximum, these gracious trees are deep, cool havens for man and birds alike. So also are the Pipals and the Banyans. Banyans are possibly the grandest of trees during summer time when with the world looking jaded seem to be totally impervious to temperature or dryness. Their red figs are an added source of attraction to hosts of avian visitors. With the Banyans, Mangos cast their gracious shade and most of these fine trees are loaded with unripe fruitdust storms are not very welcome now as it would mean the ruin of the mangocrop.

Birds, who are quite the most sensible of living things, are all full of song and cheer. Sunbirds are about with families about to graduate from the nest into a great world full of flowering trees, cocky Dhyals rise to the topmost twigs of trees to pour forth liquid tunes engorging the morning sun, Parakeets are busy courting, and exploring cavities in trees for their nuptials, White-eyes are shyly singing their ditties as they explore for suitable twigs to sling their hammocks of gossamer from, perky Tailors have already started sewing cradles for their prospective families, and Common Mynahs and pretty Brahminy Mynahs are trying to evict sleepy Spotted Owlets from their bedrooms in hollows of gnarled trees. Ioras have begun to acquire their raiments of gold and satin and Orioles flash among the cool arbours continually letting flow their rich, fluid notes. Black Drongos have chosen their mates and have started staking out territories around thorny Babools while Rollers and Hoopoes seem to find the summer's heat heady and their courtings are in full swing. Oh I forgot to mention my next door neighbour the coppersmith buoy Konk - Konk away, but then there is so much to write about, that there is no time left to do so. One day, I hope to sit down and write, and write to the wonderful month of April, and also produce words of praise for summer the forgotten season.

# CROWS MOVING HOUSE

By

Nazir Latif

I observed a curious phenomenon the other day which has left me wondering.

From the verandah of our flat in Alipore, Calcutta, we overlook a mango tree which grows in our neighbour's garden but whose branches trespass into ours. Every year for the past three years that we have lived in this flat crows have built a nest in the mango tree and raised a family during March/April. On each occasion, except this year, the nest was located in a particular fork of the tree. This year the favourite fork was abandoned in favour of another on the opposite side of the tree.

Imagine my surprise when, on my return from office one afternoon, I found the whole nest bodily transferred from its new location to the fork which had been the nesting place during the last two years. The transfer had taken place during the course of one day as I had noticed the nest in its original place whilst I was having breakfast in the verandah that morning. The twigs which went to make up the nest were not tidily arranged in the new location and I rather assumed that the mali next door, having climbed the tree to pluck green mangoes, had found the nest in the way and having bodily flung it on to one side it had happened to alight in the old fork. It soon became clear, however, that such was not the case. The nesting pair of crows continued to visit the nest and in due course an egg or eggs were laid in it and last week a chick was duly hatched. It was not possible to see whether there had been more than one egg laid but in any case this does not affect the point of my story.

The reasons and even more so the method employed for moving the nest bodily have left me mystified and I wonder if any of your readers can throw any light on this occurrence.

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## NOTES AND COMMENTS

From time to time Birdwatchers have been apprehended by the police, and by "patriots", who suspect that the binoculars are being used to unearth state secrets useful for the enemy. Your Editor had to do a lot of explaining before being released, once in the Kolaba District in Maharashtra, and again at Mehrauli in Delhi. Both these incidents took place during or immediately after the Indo-Pakistan war, when patriotism had reached its high water mark.

But it is surprising to learn from a letter received from Mr. K.P. Jadav, Rajkot on 5-4-1967 that his "binoculars were suspected as a means of spying".

It is time the Government and particularly the police were told that there is such an occupation as bird watching, and that a person with a pair of binoculars and note book and Pencil is not necessarily a criminal.

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## CORRESPONDENCE

### Feather plucking and eating in birds

Reference correspondence on 'Crow eating feathers' by D.N. Mathew of Bombay, published in your issue of April 1967, it is often noticed that the disease - "Feather plucking and eating" is found in caged birds such as parrots, canaries etc. and so also in the fowls.

The cause of this disease is said to be the lack of alkaline salts or calcium, at times a very high protein diet or even a complete deficiency of proteins may lead to this ailment. The disease is similar to "Licking sickness" in bigger animals.

No definite reason can be given in this particular case of the crow, but it is just possible that the bird was being troubled by some minute insects such as lice or had very heavy feed on the animal protein (dead animal), and when felt uneasy, tried to get itself relieved by some erratic means.

W.V. Soman  
Bombay

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### Corrections

Please refer to the April issue of the Newsletter for Birdwatchers. There are number of printing errors. In the article, "Birdwatching At Narvanda", 'Rufous' has been misprinted as 'Fufous' in the 2nd last paragraph on page 3. Then in "An Evening at Pashan Lake", the writer is referring to 'Avadavats', which has been misprinted as 'Amadavats', in the concluding paragraph on page 8.

Regarding my own article on "Larks", a portion has been left out on page 4, line 6 from below. The sentence "Their plumage is usually brown below", should read as "Their plumage is usually brown with darker streaks above and white streaked with brown below;". The Hindi name of the Rufous tailed finch lark is "AGGIYA", and not "AQIYA" as misprinted on page 7.

Mrs. Jamal Ara

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Zafar Futehally,  
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers,  
32-A, Juhu Lane,  
Andheri,  
Bombay 58-AS.

# NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 7 - No. 7 - 1967 July



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BIRDWATCHING IN THE DANGS

By

Ernest M. Shull

For more than a quarter of a century I have been trying to interest people in nature study and particularly in the study of birds. While living at Ahwa (1952-64), headquarters of the Dangs District, I tried various ways to interest students teachers, farmers, foresters, officers and others in the magnificent avifauna of this area, commonly known as the Surat Dangs. The area has a wealth of bird life. I found 291 species in the Dangs. Out of this number 140 species were collected and the others constitute sight observations. Dr. Salim Ali's two articles on THE BIRDS OF GUJARAT, published in Volume 52 of the JOURNAL OF THE BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY, have been invaluable to me in studying the birds of the Dangs.

By collecting birds for the American Museum of Natural History in New York, a great deal of interest was created among the Dangs. The students of our Mission School were fascinated by the bird study skins. Many students and others liked to watch me skin and prepare the birds. I frequently used these specimens for bird lectures in the school and in other institutions.

The bird collection stimulated interest in hiking to see the live birds in their natural habitats. The Dangs forest, with its teak trees, bamboo clumps, hills, valleys, and streams, attracts a great variety of birds and offers many fine hiking opportunities. Occasionally a small interested group or a class of students was taken on a bird hike in this area. Many sight observations took on more meaning when the bird in the field was compared with the mounted



and eggs, but not to molest or destroy them. This was an exceedingly difficult concept to teach in the Dangs, because these hill tribe peoples were often hungry. Birds and eggs of every species - even those of the tiny white-eye and surbirds - were eaten by them. I watched a Dangl boy catch a tailor bird on its nest and then heard him remark that he was going to eat it. Although such situations are to be expected among poor people, they are also regrettable. Cormorants, darters, fish-eating ducks, and other oily birds are frequently eaten. I recall with a degree of remorse my first taste of a darter or snake-bird which was roasted over an open charcoal fire in the Dangs forest at night. Its flesh was tough, but free from oil because it had been thoroughly roasted.

I use every opportunity to teach the importance of the conservation of birds and other kinds of wildlife. When I was shooting birds with a 12-gauge Winchester shotgun and its two adapters (one .32 and one .410), the question was sometimes asked about my part in the conservation program. My explanation of the scientific nature of the project probably satisfied some of my questioners but not all of them. After all, the Hindus respect for all living things (a concept for which I personally have a great deal of respect) makes the collecting of any form of animal life more difficult. Nevertheless, the limited objectives of the bird-collecting project were largely achieved.

While living in the Dangs, I continued to record daily the birds seen and heard. The discovery of another species added to my everincreasing Life List of Birds, which now numbers 1,142. Of course, I have had the advantage of three trips around the world and sixteen years of residence in India. Daily lists become more significant when detailed notes are recorded; for example, counting and recording the number of each species in a selected bog, marsh, swamp, field, forest, or garden. In the Mission School Garden at Mulchond, a village five miles down the ghat from Ahwa, some birds were permanent residents, others winter visitors only, and still others of uncertain status. Students could easily see the damage caused by the Rose-ringed, Blossom-headed, and Large Indian Parakeets to the mango, guava and other fruit trees in our school garden. Yet, it was probably not so easy for them to understand the value rendered to the garden by the presence of the many species of owls, hawks, woodpeckers, swallows, flycatchers, warblers, thrushes, sunbirds, flowerpeckers, and many other species occupying the garden. The value of these birds to the gardener, the forester, and the cultivator needs to be stressed. Generally, the hill people were interested only in their value to them as a source of food, especially of meat which most Dangis relish. Thus it was imperative to teach how these/many other ways. In fact, the listing of hawks, owls, and other birds of prey (excluding the vultures) as vermin in the Small Game Licence of Bombay State is a grave mistake, as I see it. As ornithologists know, birds of prey help to control the number of rodents, harmful insects, etc. Each species makes its own contribution to the balance of nature. If the law regarding the free shooting of the birds of prey (Raptores) has not yet been repealed or modified, **it** should be done so as quickly as possible.

Birds should be studied as a part of the total ecology of an area. For example, let us take the Cattle Egret. Formerly it was uncommon in the Dangs, but in recent years its numbers have greatly increased. Perhaps this facts has some correlation with the increase of the number of milk cows in the Dangs. The climate, flora,&fauna (including man) greatly influence such changes in an area. The number

of cattle, cattle parasites, cattle egrets, large carnivores (tigers, panthers, etc.), the acreage of forests vs. pasture and cultivated lands, and other factors help to determine the extent of bird life in an area. Birdwatchers should study the behavioral patterns of birds in their respective ecosystems.

In addition to listing the species observed, it would be helpful to count the number of each species of birds in a prescribed area. In America, this is partially accomplished by the annual Audubon Christmas Count. One day each year, December 25th, groups of birdwatchers attempt to count all the birds they can find within a 15-mile diameter circle for each counting group. This is a dawn-to-dark effort. The tabulated results give a better idea of the kind and number of each species found within a state on a specified day. This same method of counting birds is used in many states during the month of May when bird migration reaches its peak. It is variously called the "May Run," the "Grim Grind" or the "Big Day". As stated in the TIME magazine, June 2, 1967 "Its object is to identify, by sight or song, as many species of birds as possible in a 24-hour period." In America, some eight million people annually engage in this interesting form of recreation and hobby. Some small groups of birdwatchers record over one hundred species on the "Big Day." In the Dangs, eighty species would probably be something of a record. Would this method of counting have any merit for Indian birdwatchers? Could August 15 (Independence Day) or January 26 (Republic Day) become the "Big Day" in India?

When in the Dangs, we held youth camps at Mahal for the school children and for other interested young people of the District. Bird study was a part of our regular camp program. Early morning bird hikes and nature study classes were scheduled daily. In addition to the splendid books written by Dr. Salim Ali, we used the Glimpses of Nature Series published by the Bombay Natural History Society. This Series, which is published in English, Hindi, Gujarati, and Marathi, should be greatly expanded to include many more of the common birds and a few of the rare and unusual birds. India is greatly in need of more nature teaching aids: coloured bird charts, bird calendars, area check-lists, migratory flyway maps, pocket field guides, inexpensive binoculars, etc. Perhaps the Government and interested individuals could help our schools, camps, clubs, and other organisations to upgrade nature study teaching by giving them financial aid.

If you want to see some of India's most interesting birds - Malabar Trogon, Paradise Flycatcher, Malabar Whistling Thrush, Orange Minivet, Malabar Black Woodpecker, Vigor's Yellow-backed Sunbird, Large Wood Shrike, Indian Peafowl, Malherbe's Golden-backed Woodpecker, Verditer Flycatcher, Forest Wagtail, Racket-tailed Drongo, Brown-headed Stork-billed Kingfisher, Indian Pitta, and many other rare and fascinating species - plan to do some of your birdwatching in the Dangs. It has the most unique avifauna of India. I'm just sorry that I am no longer living in the Dangs to enjoy a bird hike with you.

## A VISIT TO PERIYAR

By

Shama Futehally

Periyar lake is about three thousand feet above sea level. The mainland is thick with forested mountains, the jungle comprising mainly 'Southern Evergreen' trees such as Pterocarpus marsupium, Evodia roxburgiana, Lagerstroemia lanceolata, and Terminalia paniculata. The trees of-course extended as tall as a couple of hundred feet in the thicker jungle.

The abundance of bird life inside the sanctuary was overwhelming: we conscientious birdwatchers felt no need to tramp up and down in the sun with binoculars all day, and could see scores of exciting species all round merely by sitting quietly for some time in the forest. It was also worthwhile to scan all the tree trunks very carefully, because they harboured a continual stream of nuthatches and leaf warblers and even babblers : and like all the other birds these overwhelmed by sheer numbers.

One of the commonest birds was the Grackle or Hill myna, the large and odd-looking myna with an orange flesh projection on the cheek. The birds were often in large groups, and I thought I noticed that unlike other mynas they remained mainly in the tree tops. Other common birds were the Racket-tailed and the Black Drongoes, though they were oftener heard than seen. The Malabar Black Hornbill was evasive rather than uncommon, and not as conspicuous as the Malabar Grey Hornbill.

An intriguing bird was the Southern Rufous Woodpecker, a small brown woodpecker with paler streaks all over the body. We were lucky enough to see two or three pairs courting on the tree trunks, which was a kind of adroit and elaborate peek-a-boo done like a dance going down the trunk on opposite sides. On one occasion I came across a small olive green flowerpecker with yellowish undersides pecking at a bunch of wild berries. At first sight it looked like an unimaginative Tickell's. At second sight it had a white eyestripe and curved black beak, and so it became a Nilgiri Flowerpecker. This is described as being found in all the South West ranges up to about 4,000'.

Malherbe's Golden backed Woodpeckers were very abundant. These are different from the common Goldenbacked in their less bright golden-yellow back and crimson instead of black rump. However their call - a questioning trrrr - is indistinguishable from that of the latter; the sound became familiar in Periyar. We saw both the Common and the Southern Treepie, which latter is a larger and more imposing bird, 'chestnut-bay above, white below', with pied wings and a long grey and white tail. Another interesting bird was the Yellowbrowed Bulbul. I saw a pair in a large Ixora shrub - crestless, with olive-green heads, light-brown wings, yellow breast and yellow streaks down the back.

The jungle of-course abounded in parakeets but we were only able to identify one pair, which was the Bluewinged. The birds flew down about three yards away to a small Santalum Album shrub in a clearing, and after some wing-fluttering they were gone again. I wonder if that was the only species in the area. I have already mentioned the nuthatches; these were the Velvet fronted and probably the Chestnut bellied.

Of the first I saw one solitary specimen climbing low down a tree trunk, almost vertically probing for insects. It was later I saw another unmistakable nuthatch, slightly plumper than the Velvet-fronted, but silhouetted in such doubtful twilight that the identification of Chestnut-bellied must remain only a promising suggestion.

The commonest species of babbler was one slightly smaller than the jungle babbler, dark brown with lighter underparts and a short black and yellow bill. The large and noisy flocks centered, again, round the tree trunks. It seemed a likely candidate for the Rufous Babbler, which is found in the Palnis, Nilgiris, and associated ranges around Travancore up to 3,500'. However I missed the slaty blue forehead which should have been decisive in its identification.

During a walk in the forest we heard two or three Whistling Schoolboys at intervals but they couldn't be traced, even though this patch of forest was comparatively bare. My father and a friend, walking along the road to Thekkady, came across a flock of Whiterumped Spinetailed Swifts flying low over the ground about ten feet away. This bird is described by Salim Ali: 'a small forest swift, black above with a broad white band across the rump, the chin throat and breast greyish-brown, passing into white on the abdomen and undertail coverts. Found in loose rabbles, hawking over forests, sometimes quite low. Resident but not common among the South-Western ranges and West Mysore'.

Two mammals which shared the treetops - and trunks - with the avifauna must be mentioned in passing; the Nilgiri Black Langurs, (*Presbytis johnii*) and the Giant Indian Squirrels (*Ratufa indica*). The langurs were abundant and noisy and rather too tame. The squirrels were of the race *Maxima*, light brown all over with black shoulders, rump and tail. Incidentally at Mudumalai the week before we had seen the race *Centralis* of the same species, which lacked the black rump and had only a partially black tail and lighter shoulders.

Out on the lake itself there were a few Darters sunning themselves on the several dead tree trunks sticking out of the water; two or three Pied Kingfishers, and on one occasion a Whitenecked Stork flying high over the lake. Once close to the landing I also caught sight of a solitary Indian Pitta, and a wagtail very like the Large Pied but smaller - this was probably the Madras Black wagtail. It was single, and its flight and call were the same as that of the common Grey Wagtail, a low jerky flight accompanied by a short sharp tweet-tweet. Incidentally when on the lake we were fortunate with the mammals as well, seeing large herds of wild elephant, sambar, and Indian Bison on the island-hills circling the water.

Perhaps I ought to emphasise again that what was exciting was the almost oppressive number of birds, even when the species was familiar. At the same time there was no lack of completely new species, and in fact in this article I have cautiously suppressed our more ambitious identifications.

A LINNAEAN ALPHABET  
(Continued)

By

R.A. Stewart Mellsuish

ORIOIUS, Oriole, is from the Latin aureolus, golden or of a golden colour. aurum is Latin for gold.

ORTHOTOMUS, tailor-bird. From orthos, straight or true, and temnō, to cut. Not an appropriate name for a tailor whose distinctive skill is stitching.

PANDION, used of the osprey genus. The original Pandion was an Athenian king, but it is not clear how or why his memory is preserved in the name of the fish-hawk. In Greek mythology he certainly had close connexions with birds, however, and possibly he, like his offspring, was turned into a bird. He had two daughters, Procne, or Progne, and Philomela. Procne was married to Pandion's ally Tereus, king of Thrace, and they had a child called Itys. When Philomela went to Thrace to visit her sister, Tereus seduced her and then chopped out her tongue to stop her telling. According to the Oxford Classical Dictionary, however, 'she contrived to send her sister a piece of embroidery on which she had woven her story.' Procne thus came to know of Philomela's suffering, and avenged her. She slew Itys, roasted him, and gave him to Tereus for supper. Tereus thereupon tried to destroy both the sisters, but at this point the gods intervened to forestall any further nastiness, and turned Tereus into a hoopoe, Procne into a nightingale, and Philomela into a swallow, though in some Latin authors the latter are reversed. Another authority converts Tereus into an owl, and restores Itys to life as a pheasant.

Of this sorry group only Procne finds her way into the Indian list, in the form HYDROPROGNE, an aquatic swallow (though of all terns the Caspian is surely the least hirundinesque) and HEMIPROGNE, the Crested Swift.

PHOENICOPTERUS, the Great Flamingo. phoenix, crimson; pteron, wing. Homer says that the first people to discover and use phoenix-coloured dye were the Phoenicians. The word includes all dark reds, from crimson to purple. The colour of its fruit has given the name to the family and a genus of date palms. The word also appears in the scientific names for the redstarts and the Whitebreasted Waterhen, PHOENICURUS (oura means tail), and C. REULAX PHOENICEUS is the Crimsonwinged Laughing Thrush. The mythological Phoenix was probably so-called because it burned on a funeral-pyre and hence was depicted as the colour of flame or the sky at sundown.

In PHOENICONAIAS, the name given to the Lesser Flamingo, Naias is a water-nymph: strictly, a river-nymph (naō, to flow) as opposed to a sea-nymph (Nereis).

RUBER and ROSEUS (notice that the vowels in both words are all short) are variously applied to the race or species of the Great Flamingo which is resident in India, and the former to a number of other species with roseate plumage. ruber is Latin for red, and like its close relative rufus occurs in many compound specific names. Cp. Sanskrit rudhira, blood; the Greek eruthrus, red, as in TRINGA ERUTHROPUS, where PUS is from pous, foot; and the English

... which come from the same root, e.g. rufous, rubric, rubicund, ruddy, russet.

RHŌPOCICHLA is an appropriate name for the genus of black-headed babblers. The word literally means bush-thrush. rhōpos (genitive rhōpos) is a bush or a shrub, used in the plural by Homer for undergrowth. kichlē is a thrush. This gives rise to the verb kichlizō, to chirp like a thrush, hence to titter or giggle. It is tempting to think that the English giggle has its origin in thrushy chortlings in the underbrush, but the dictionaries offer no encouragement to this notion. Incidentally, kichlizō can also mean to eat thrushes, i.e. to live luxuriously.

The greenbilled malkoha, RHŌPODYTES, creeps (or plunges) into bushes.

(To be continued)

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#### MORE ABOUT MOONDAIDAPPU

By

K.K. Neelakantan

In the August 1964 issue of the NEWSLETTER Mrs. Usha Ganguly wrote about her visit to the village of Moondaidappu, between Tirunelvely and Nagercoil. She went there on the 21st of May, 1964. On the 21st of May this year Mr. P.K. Padmanabhan and I also reached Moondaidappu rather unexpectedly. Though we had hoped to see a few pelican nests, the only pelican we saw appeared for a few minutes, soaring over a clump of palmyra trees furlongs away from the village. The only birds we found nesting at Moondaidappu were Painted Storks and Little Cormorants. There were no egrets at all this year anywhere near the village.

The villagers' pride in their birds makes them exaggerate the glory of their heronry. When we asked them about pelicans they swore that hundreds were actually breeding there though 'just then' they were all away feeding. Unless the local pelicans carried their nests and young with them when they went out foraging, this could not have been true. One villager, on being told that we were keen on knowing the truth, confessed that no pelican had built there this season. He seemed to feel like a traitor.

The nests this year were on 4 tamarind trees west of the road, and on 2 tamarinds and a neem on the eastern side inside the 'sathram' (choultry) compound. Almost all the Painted Storks and all the Little Cormorants had fully fledged young, many already flying. One young cormorant had found its way into a square well inside the choultry and appeared to be incapable of flying out.

There were two or three nests of the Painted Stork containing downy young which were being protected from the sun by one of their parents. The adult bird stood between the sun and the squabs with its wings half open, the tips touching the body. From a distance it looked like an outside jug with huge handles.

House and Jungle Crows were in attendance and seemed to give a lot of trouble to the storks and cormorants. No kites were seen at this heronry.

We did not attempt to count the nests, but a rough estimate is that there must have been 200-250 Painted Stork nests and about 80-100 of the Little Cormorant.

The villagers gather the 'guano' and use it as a manure for chilli plants (capsicum).

The local names of the birds mentioned above are:-

Pelican - 'koozhakkada'

Painted Stork - 'sengaal naarai' (= redlegged stork)

Cormorant - 'neer Kaakkai' (water crow).

A native of Koondakulam informed us that a number of Pelicans had nests at Koondakulam this year. Koondakulam appears to be a very much larger heronry where various other water birds also breed. We saw some 30 Openbill Storks soaring and drifting over Moondaidappu at noon.

There seem to be quite a few heronries in this area which is full of shallow irrigation tanks. A systematic survey of the place may prove very fruitful.

In the "HINDU" dated 5-8-66 there was a short account of one such heronry at Kanjiramkulam, a village 3 miles from Mudukulathur in Ramnad district. Here too the villagers seem to provide excellent protection to the breeding birds. To quote from the article, here "scores of pelicans, herons etc. can be seen walking side by side with domesticated animals. ... Even dogs in the village do not attack the birds even if they pass very close." The author includes "white cranes", "whooping cranes" and sea gulls among the birds 'usually' seen there between September and April. It is to be hoped that some bird-watcher will visit these places and publish true and detailed accounts of the birds breeding there.

\* \* \* \* \*

RAJKOT ON 10TH JUNE

By

K.S. Lavkumar

At this moment, Rajkot is dessicated. The water in the taps, when it does come, smells, as the reservoir, I am told, is almost a puddle filled with dead and dying fish. I hope to go over and see, as there must be quite a few ithiophagous birds around having a mighty gettogether. However we, like the fish, are all praying for the monsoon to arrive. As I write the temperature is rising. It is noon and the mercury stands at 35C in my room. Outside there is a slight breeze stirring the trees, this after days of blasting winds from the sea. The humidity is high and perspiration makes wearing clothes horrid. If this continues a couple of days more there will be thunder storms.

The trees and the few dessicated gardens in the city are an attraction to birds from the surrounding areas. Right in the middle of the town, in my back-garden, there is

a congregation of Bayas, all males in their yellow caps and shirt-fronts. Two pairs of Red-vented Bulbuls are welcome inmates of what is left of the gardens and they have nests in thick shrubs which are boldly defying the dessication. Sparrows have just completed the first round of brood-rearing and are now thinking of starting all over again. So are the Tailors, but these charming little creatures are a little hesitant and would rather wait for the first showers. The Purple Sunbirds have completed their family-raising task and the cocks are showing abrasions in their glistening suits. Copperseiths are also free from their family chores and are less vocal than when I had left in April for the Hills. Rose ringed Parakeets have completed their house-warming celebrations and several pairs now have growing families to cater for.

Black Ibis regularly breed in the tree in our garden and they have selected a tall neem to build in this year. If the rains do not come in time, they are going to suffer a good deal.

Koels are everywhere and their Koo-oo, Koo-oo, koo-oo's add a pleasant dreaminess to the languid summer days, (those English Sahibs must have been truly cantankerous to have found the Kokila's call irksome). The Koel's pleasure can be understood when one sees coy looking crows picking sticks and behaving in a circumspect manner. The implications are obvious.

A homely Little Brown Dove has a twiggy platform in tangles of a huge and unproductive grape-vine outside my window. Cradled on this flimsy structure are two blobs of life which only a mother dove can be proud of.

I am keeping my ears cocked for the liquid call of a pitta which drops in every year at this time on its way to shadey nullahs in the Gir Forest to breed. I understand one is hopping around in the shade of our orchard at Jasdan.

We in the school are justifiably proud of our drove of peafowl. Every summer the proud cocks stride onto the lawns (or what is left of them) to unfurl their gorgeous trains to be admired by their harems as well as us humans who happen to be around. Here is something to be said for sentiments as factors in nature conservation. Watching these half domesticated birds, I am reminded of the Delhi Zoo. How unimaginative bureaucrats can be when they place these fine creatures behind wire instead of allowing them to roam the wide lawns and display themselves at an advantage!

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## NOTES AND COMMENTS

### THE TULSI FOREST

A delegation of the Bombay Natural History Society, Friends of Trees, and the Birdwatchers Field Club of India called on the Minister of Forests on the 27th June, 1967, and presented him with the following memorandum.



" The forest forms part of a vital catchment area bordering the lakes of Vihar and Tulsi. The deciduous and evergreen trees, the shrubs and grass form a natural complex which can hold its own only if there is no wood cutting and destruction by men and cattle. The forest prevents soil erosion, silting of the lake, helps in precipitating rainfall, and is the only area within 50 miles of Bombay where people can come in contact with nature.

It is also a place of study for naturalists, and can become a valuable out door laboratory for botanists, biologists and others. A paper published in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society could be followed up to cover the whole area.

There has been a steady increase in wood cutting and destruction over the last ten years. Headloads of wood are removed without any check whatsoever, and large branches of living trees are hacked down with impunity as these photographs will show. Quarrying operations inside the forest are destroying the habitats, and large herd of cattle and goats browse and graze without any restriction. If denudation goes on at this pace, there will be no forest left in a few years.

#### Suggestions:

- 1) Two forest guards must be on permanent duty in this area.
- 2) There should be no departmental or other felling operations at least for three years.
- 3) Fresh indigenous trees, particularly Bombax, Erythrina, Palas and Mahwa should be planted immediately.
- 4) Notices warning against cutting and indicating that this is a protected area should be put up, at least one in every mile.
- 5) An attempt should be made to restock the forest with birds and animals originally existing here. A beginning could be made by introducing a few chitals which are available at the Powai Park.
- 6) No grazing by cattle and goats."

The Minister explained that Government has decided to convert the whole area into a National Park, and thereafter the preservation of the forest could be effectively enforced. Meanwhile he passed immediate orders that there should be no departmental felling in Tulsi in the future. This is a very encouraging step.

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#### CORRESPONDENCE

##### Arrival of the Pied Crested Cuckoo in Ahmedabad

Although Mr. E.W. Maske's request for the dates of arrival of the Pied Crested Cuckoo in various parts of India had a poor response last year, I hope he will get more information from readers of the 'Newsletter' this year.

In June last year I had given dates of arrival and departure in and from Bhubaneswar of the Pied Crested Cuckoo (Clamator jacobinus) .

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In June last year I had given dates of arrival and departure in and from Bhubaneswar of the Pied Crested Cuckoo (Clamator jacobinus).

This year I happen to be in Ahmedabad during this part of the year. I arrived in Ahmedabad on June 8. On June 14, I heard the Pied Crested Cuckoo call repeatedly in the

morning. On June 15, i.e. today, I again heard it call repeatedly and I also saw a pair of birds. Had the birds been present in the area between June 8 and 14, I think I would not have missed them.

Ahmedabad also experienced a fairly heavy shower on the afternoon of June 14.

S.D. Jayakar,  
Bhubaneswar.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### Indian Reef Heron observed in Poona.

According to Salim Ali the Indian Reef Heron is essentially a bird of the coast, never found far inland above tidal influence. On 20 March 1967, I saw an Indian Reef Heron on a rock in the middle of the stream of Mutha river near Datta Vadi. The colour was bluish slaty all over with a white patch on throat. The feet were distinctly yellow as seen through the binoculars. It also had a crest of two narrow plumes, which is supposed to be acquired in the breeding season. Is there any possibility of my having mistaken the identity of the bird?

V.N. Kelkar

(Dr. Salim Ali adds that the birds are occasionally blown in far in land from the coasts - Ed.)

\* \* \* \* \*

#### Miscellaneous Observations

Last November I noticed Redvented Bulbuls, Common Mynas, Tailor birds, and Ashy Wren Warblers suck dew regularly from the leaves of flowering plants in the mornings. I wonder if the dew was mere refreshment or if it contained any insects which were palatable to the birds.

Four years back a pair of house sparrows first nested in one of our verandah 'chicks'. We have since changed our house twice, but every year, not only the pair of sparrows but mynas, pigeons and turtle doves build on the same chick, though there are several others in the house. I wonder why this is so. I also remember a case a few years back of an aggressive Common myna ousting a pigeon from its nest and then occupying the nest itself.

Two Goldenbacked Woodpeckers and one Yellowfronted Pied Woodpecker was seen plucking insects, possibly termites, from the lawn of a golf course. Though Salim Ali in his Book of Indian Birds has mentioned this kind of thing this is the first time I have seen it happening myself.

I have been watching a male shoveller regularly in the backwaters of the Jamuna near the Wazirabad headquarters. Apparently it is healthy and there is nothing wrong with its flight, but it shows no intention of migrating though it is late for a shoveller to be around.

Lt. Col. A David

\*\*\*\*\*

Nests made of wire by the Common Crow

While cleaning the steel trusses and purlins of a factory roof structure with asbestos sheet covering, no less than one dozen nests of the common crow were knocked down. All these nests were 'fabricated' from mild steel galvanized and black wire in thickness varying from 1/8" to 1/20".

The wires were cleverly woven around the corner of steel purlins and built up to form a perfect dish in the centre of about 8 to 10 inches in diameter and 3 to 4 inches deep. The outer dimension of the nest varied between 14 to 18 inches.

I examined two nests very carefully and found that in the dish, wires were interwoven with others and loose ends were neatly tucked in. In one nest there was a 3 ft. long wire going round and also interwoven with others. The dish was lined with feathers and droppings.

One month after knocking down the nests, I find that two more wire nests have appeared in different corners of the factory roof.

A.S. Gilam

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Zafar Futehally,  
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers,  
32-A, Juhu Lane,  
Andheri,  
Bombay - 58 AS).

# NEWSLETTER

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## FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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Volume 7 - No. 8 - 1967 August



NEWSLETTER  
FOR  
BIRDPWATCHERS

Vol. 7, No.8

August 1967

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A TERAJ TEA GARDEN IN MARCH

By

Maureen Thom

Bare shade trees and well-pruned tea bushes are a perfect background for birdwatching at present, though the lack of shade and cover must be anything but a joy to the birds themselves. Fortunately for them, some of the sections are only lightly pruned and they make full use of this. Already, on March 18th, I saw a Common Mynah carrying caterpillars busily into a particularly thick patch, and the Magpie Robins who built last year in the tea to the east of the bungalow are hard at it again. In these still leafy sections, a few winter visitors still linger. Brown Shrikes, and Red-breasted Flycatchers are still with us, and Collared Bushchats were, up to about the 9th. There were at least 2 parties of Tree Pipits around this month, who, disturbed from their investigations under the tea, fly up into the shade trees with their plaintive "peeping", there to wag their tails slowly until all is quiet again, when they drop straight down into the tea. I have not seen Grey-headed Flycatchers at all this month, but the sound of hedge-clipping still indicates the presence of Blyth's Reed Warbler in the heart of a tea bush, and a little patience will be rewarded by seeing it emerge at the top, "clipping" and jerking its tail.

Owls dominated the bird orchestra most of this month, both by day and night - particularly the long lovely rippling and "pu put" of the Barred Owlet. This year I have been able to improve my acquaintance with them, as they sit in daylight in the bare trees. I heard the Common Hawk-cuckoo in full voice in January in a garden near the Bhutan border but ours only started in the middle of February and are still

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be said to dominate. I heard no koels at all last year, but on the 10th March I heard the first "who are you"? coming tentatively from the direction of the labour lines. There, there are a few crows but they seldom make themselves heard here, so we can enjoy the gentle background music of the Spotted and Red Turtle Doves. Parakeets seem to have ceased their swift noisy excursions through the trees in large flocks this month, though they are far from silent. Other occupations are more interesting now - though I have not spotted any home-making, love-making has begun. The sweetest sounds come from the huge flocks of Red-whiskered Bulbuls who spread themselves over the garden during the day and assemble for roosting with such a delightful crescendo of sound towards dusk, - and of course the daylong warsongs of Magpie Robins and Purple Sunbirds. I have not been able to discover why we have no Blue-throated Barbets to join the chorus. Their calls are an outstanding feature of the neighbouring forest and up into the nearby foothills, but this garden only seems to support a few Lineated Barbets and, of course, many Copper-smiths.

I find the bare trees particularly useful when identifying birds flying overhead, as I've been able, really satisfactorily, to link the sight of Crested Serpent Eagles and Crested Hawk Eagles with their very distinctive calls. One can also examine every incredible antic of Grey-headed Mynahs hunting through shade trees, with their attendant Bronze Drongos and Pied Woodpeckers, and note how bold piracy on the part of the drongos is so good-naturedly tolerated. This is a good garden for Woodpeckers, for I've seen plenty of Golden-backed, as well as Little Scaly-bellied and Yellow-naped, and I examine every ant's nest I see hopefully just now, for the Rufous Woodpeckers I feel sure must be here. I have often wondered if there is something edible in the bark of the shade trees, apart from the insects. They do exude gum. Not only Mynahs of all sorts, but Parakeets too, seem to gnaw at it. Perhaps this accounts for our large populations of the latter, which includes Large, Rose-ringed, Red-breasted and possibly Slaty-headed Parakeets. I have seen no birds eating the seeds, which seems a pity as they are so abundant just now, making a pleasing dry rustling in the wind, - a sound that could be mistaken for rushing water - the rarest sound of all during our celibrated droughts.

At these times I fill shallow "gumlahs" with water and have been richly rewarded. A Himalayan Whistling Thrush bathed and drank morning and evening all through the cold weather up to 12th March, when he disappeared. Jungle Babblers were most amusing to watch. They did not seem to know the techniques at first - they hopped round the bowl discussing it shrilly and for so long that a waiting mynah impatiently took possession. The Babblers looked on with interest, and in due course each ventured to have a "lick and a promise" - that time! They are confirmed and practised bathers now! Rufous Treepies are still nervous. After each tentative dip they spring straight out and even sometimes straight into a branch, frantically fluffed out, only to return a few minutes later to scatter any birds who thought it was their turn. Of the Grey-headed Mynahs, one always seems to "hog" the bowl, gazing round fiercely and splashing vigorously, while the others wait none too patiently, trying to snatch a quick drink or profit from the wilder splashes! Many other birds use the baths, but I wonder how the others exist on the dew, which is so meagre now? - or do they fly to the nearest watercourse, - which is a mere trickle in March?



We have had one really severe dust-storm that tragically demolished a Purple Sunbird's nest earlier this month. As it was in the bougainvillea near the house, I was especially disappointed. The Hoopoe's home should fare better, in a natural hole about 10 feet up a shade tree. I hope to spot a few more nests this month and next. It is blissfully easy to settle down in amongst the tea bushes to watch, temporary unseen by both birds and passers-by - even if it does give me the reputation of being quite the maddest memsahib ever to live in New Chumta!

\* \* \* \* \*

## OUR MAGPIE-ROBINS

By

Leela Nilakanta

Last year, in July, my son had written about the birdhouse nest in our garden. This birdhouse, made of cement asbestos board was attractive to the Magpie-Robins only when the house started disintegrating. In fact it has been such an attraction that again this year it is being used.

Last year the pair of Magpie-Robins that my son wrote about, successfully raised three fledglings. We watched them being taught to fly and to get their own food.

Unfortunately, the male, which had been ringed by us, was shot by one of the neighbourhood boys. My son rescued it but evidently it died as we never saw it again.

The mother bird lamented for a while but continued to be busy with the bringing up of its babies. One of these was ringed by us.

During the course of the year this ringed baby grew up and we realised that it was a male. It paired off with its mother.

On June 9th this year I noticed the female Magpie-Robin flying into the birdhouse with nesting material. So it is the female which chooses its nesting place!

Soon there was hectic activity by both the parents in nest-building. Then occasionally the father bird used to feed the mother when she was brooding.

In the first week of July there was a faint "cheep, cheep" from the nest. As days went by this "cheep, cheep" became louder and more demanding. I got so accustomed to this background noise that I didn't understand when a friend asked me one day "Have you got rats in your roof?" I thought this was a variation of "Have you got bats in your belfry?".

The parents fed the babies with small worms in the beginning but as days went by they took larger worms and even small lizards to their offspring. One day they were tearing to bits what looked like a white toadstool. On closer inspection this turned out to be a piece of tender coconut. So even vegetarian fare is welcome to the fledglings at this stage!

On 13th July, in the afternoon there was a commotion near the drumstick tree where the nest is, with the sparrows chirping and both the Magpie-Robins "chirr-chirr"-ing. I did not take any notice thinking a cat or a snake to be the cause. But after some time I heard the "cheep, cheep" of the baby birds from the tamarind tree in a different part of our garden. I went to investigate, but could find only the parent birds giving the alarm-cry.

It took me over an hour to find where the babies were. I had to sit quietly but even then the parent birds were wary. At last the father lost patience or else the hungry cries became too plaintive for him to ignore. He brought some food and did a swift landing and take-off. Even then the babies were so well hidden that I couldn't spot them.

But by the evening they became bolder. One baby flew onto our dining-room window and after hopping about from latch to sill to top of door managed to fly onto our neighbour's terrace. This one was quite bold and we could watch it from very near.

Meanwhile the other baby flew into our Rangoon-Jasmine bush which is only a few feet off from the ground. We had to watch carefully lest it fall a prey to the prowling cat. This baby was obviously the more nervous of the two. It hesitated for a long time before gathering courage to attempt a flight of a few yards to another bush. But even then it was so clumsy that it fell plonk onto the ground and had to hop into the hedge for safety. The poor thing needed a lot of coaxing from the mother-bird to try any more attempts at flying. Finally it landed on a banana tree and that was the last time I saw it.

We did not hear them the next day or the following few days. We were speculating about their safety when one day the parents were back in their familiar haunts but with only one baby. After another day they have disappeared again though I see flashes of white and black flitting by occasionally. We are hoping that this disappearance is only temporary.

Anyhow because of this nesting activity of the Magpie-Robins in summer we have had a dearth of bird life in our garden. They do not look kindly on any intruder, be it a squirrel or a bird.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### A CLIMB UP THE ROHTANG PASS

By

K.S. Lavkumar

The Cuckoos are here, and one has alighted in the tree above my tent and is melodiously calling, the soft up-up-up-up of a Hoopoe can be heard from the forest, and a flight of Minivets has alighted on a tall Spruce, the males glowing with unbelievable intensity against the deep blue of the sky.

Last night was clear and the stars shone with great lustre. A scops Owl calls Woo-hoo and Woo-hoo again.

We started the climb at 7.00 a.m. The sky was clear and the upper slopes of the mountains where bathed in warm, golden morning light. We were in shadow of the great bulk of the pass and a cold wind was blowing down from it. On every occasion I have done this pass, wind has been troublesome. The track starts climbing suddenly behind the last teahouse of Rhalla. It goes up a narrow gully flanked on the left by a sheer cliff rising to perpetual snow. Trees have been cut over the centuries for fire by wayfarers, but high up in inaccessible places oak and pine grow----- The sunlight is on us and in its warm rays we sit for a rest and look down at Rhalla; we have come high but are still below tree-line and at about 11,000'. A pair of White-capped Redstarts are picking insects--there seem to be lots of these for they are kept very busy indeed. All the food is on the ground and in the sogging wet soil. Small plants are putting out first tentative shoots, and some snow still lies in gullies and in shelter of rocks. The wind is tyrannical, but birds are taking shelter from its blasts behind the many boulders. The Redstarts are very tame and sense like all high altitude birds a warm kinship of life with us. They appraise us with keen eyes and ~~chortle~~ a merry tune which is the first I have heard. Along the raging torrents besides which one normally comes across them, this private conversation is not heard. /of A large rabble/Hodgson's Pipits flashes up from below and after wheeling around settles down a little way off on the sogging tundra vegetation. Their warmly pinkflushed breasts give a handsome touch to their otherwise drab brown plumage. A Kestrel skims down and the Redstarts ~~scuttle~~ under a large rockslab and the pipits are off. We continue our ascent against the gusty wind.-----We are now close to the snow. The treeline is well below us, though on the opposite side of the infant Beas a few starkly leafless Birch stand out white against the deep blue sky. They make a wonderful scene; a flight of six Snow Pigeon flash past and several Yellow-billed Choughs glide over to take a closer look at us. They are graceful, sleek and soft voiced. Two Red-billed Choughs also fly over. They have longer primaries and are less interested in us. They wheel round and settle on a patch of warm bog free of snow and start probing the wet soil with their long, downcurved, coral-red bills. Three starling-sized birds alight alongside and start hopping around in a manner of outsized chats. In favourable light their almost black colour reveals a glist ening, satin blue body with black tail and wings. These are male Grandalas. There are no females around. Clouds are rapidly forming on the pass, and we press on. There is snow all around and the path is trampled through it which becomes deeper and deeper. The incline continues and the going become wearisome. The clouds are thickening and it is getting chilly. Two sparrow-sized birds fly past and alight on a rock protruding from the snow. I halt awhile to glance at them. They are dark brown all over with darker streaks and their faces are a deep glistening crimson, (males of Red-breasted Rosefinch?). Lower down on some other rocks was perched a little bird which bobbed on seeing me and flew away across the snow, I recognised it as a cock Blue-fronted Redstart which is quite common along the Himalayas above the treeline. Its chestnut tail has a black terminal band a diagnostic feature from the Black Redstart which it resembles superficially.

It was 4.30 P.M. when the top of the pass was reached. The clouds had thickened and it was snowing hard. Visibility was cut to a few yards and the pass was desolate and without colour. Suddenly from the vapours around me a large flock of Swifts (Eastern Swifts?) sped low overhead towards Lahoul, then I was left to myself to plod on into the soft snow, only the beaten footprints of earlier travellers showed the

There were many birds around, Yellow-billed Choughs, scavenging for food, hesitant Carrion Crows, less pushing than their brethren across the Rohtang in Manali. Red-billed Choughs which are very plentiful in Lahoul and kept to the fields were briskly probing the warm soil. Birds were every where. In pairs, Eastern Meadow Buntings gleaned seeds under cover of rocks, a habit reminding one of the Grey-necked Buntings which visit Saurashtra in winter. Their warm tones blend easily into the dark colours of the open patches left by the melting snow. Flocks of Mountain Finches flew noisily around, and there was a lot of commotion and bickering all the time. These are restless birds and moved around in great flocks. Black Redstarts were staking territories and even the females were singing and it was curious to see a cock and a hen Redstart fiercely fighting. Black Redstarts have an interesting distribution in summer. They seem to cross the main snow range of the Himalayas and once the traveller enters the drier trans Himalayan valleys, this little bird is his constant companion through Lahoul into Tibet. They have a peculiar weezy song which is interspersed with a paper-rustling sound. They are as confiding in their arid summer habitat as they are during winter in shady gardens and groves in India. ---- On a patch of flat ground below the rest house young willows have been planted in beds enclosed by low bunds. These were flooded by clear water from the melting snow and I saw a couple of Grey Wagtails, several brightly attired Yellow-headed Wagtails (Black-backed variety). A Couple of Indian Tree Pipits quietly fed alongside the pools and flocks of Hodgsons ran over the swampy wet turf. Side by side they were easy to compare. A pair of White-capped Redstarts flitted around among the drab pipits. Whistling Thrushes were chasing each other and singing vigorously. Going down to the river, I strolled over the shingle banks hoping to see a Kashmir Dipper, but instead noted a Little Forktail which flew from one boulder to another in midstream. Plumbeous Redstarts were conspicuous by their absence. There were many Snow Pigeons flighting along the sheer cliffs across the river and pairs often flew over to glean among the flats beside the river; they were very confiding. A Chuckoor set up a loud clatter among scree on the other side. Walking up to the Gompa, I was surprised to come across a Rufous-backed Shrike. It was being scolded by Black Redstarts and Mountain Finches all perched atop the great rocks. The shrike paid no heed to their abuses. Sunbathing in the glowing noon sun after a pair of Lammer geysers effortlessly gliding along the immense crags. The effort of crossing the vicious Rohtang was worth all the weariness.

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## BIRD WATCHING ON ELEPHANTA ISLAND

By

N.M. Mistry

When, recently, I visited Elephanta island, Bombay, I came away thrilled, not only by the exquisite sculptures of a bygone age, but also by the variegated bird life on this tiny island which has an area of hardly two square miles. On my earlier visits to the island, which were all on holidays, I had hardly noticed any bird life. Evidently, the birds retreat to remoter nooks or desert the island completely when it is invaded by the picnickers from Bombay.

Even as the launch **bore**d the pier I saw both brown and black-headed gulls hovering in the sky. The pier on the west side of the island is fairly long and passes by a mangrove swamp. Here were our usual friends, the little waders, - the **Spotted Sandpiper**, the **Little Ringed-Plover** and the **Little Stint**. A **Night Heron** which was resting in a tree some distance away, took alarm and flew away.

At the end of the pier there is a steep climb to the caves. On **both** sides there are a number of large trees, especially **banyans**, silk-cotton trees and Indian coral trees. There is also a small private orchard to the left of the path. This area seemed to be a great favourite with birds. Before I had reached the caves, hardly a furlong **away** from the pier, I had spotted a pair of Indian Robins, a pair of Small Minivets and a pair of Common Ioras, not to mention Copper-smiths, Mynahs, Magpie-Robins, Common Green Bee-Eaters, Black Drongos, Bulbuls (Red-vented and Red-whiskered), a Tailor Bird and a Spotted Dove. Surprisingly, the birds showed **no** signs of fear and even the Spotted Dove, which seems to consider man as its traditional enemy, showed no inclination to fly away to a safer distance. The colourings of the Male Iora and the Male Small Minivet was a feast for the eye, while the Ioras were singing delightfully. There was also a not uncommon display of ferocity by a pair of Black Drongos which mercilessly attacked a red-vented Bulbul intruding near their nest.\* These lion-hearted birds attack any other birds that come near their nest, irrespective of their size, and I have seen a pair of Black Drongos chasing a frightened Crow-Pheasant away from their nest.

After I had seen the caves I took a stroll to the top of the smaller of the two hills and was suitably rewarded by the sight of a Purple Sunbird and a Purple-rumped Sunbird, a White-breasted Kingfisher and a number of White-backed vultures. Near the top where there is a huge canon I saw a solitary Yellow-fronted Pied or Mahratta Woodpecker (*Dryobates Mahrattensis*) working its way slowly up the trunk of a tree in typical Woodpecker fashion. In the valley below, I also heard a long drawn Ki-ree-ree-ree-ree-ree of a Goldenbacked Woodpecker. I also saw the rather rare sight of a crow sipping nectar from the flowers of an Indian Coral tree. We are so accustomed to see this bird feeding on garbage and refuse that it is rather amusing to see it derive its food from flowers. As I finally descended to the pier a Brahminy Kite came gliding majestically overhead.

There is nothing uncommon about the birds I saw on Elephanta island. As a matter of fact, common jungle birds like the Racket-Tailed Drongo, the Green Barbet, the Barred Jungle Owlet, Babblers and Shrikes, were conspicuous by their absence. However, the noteworthy feature is the abundance of bird life there. I saw so many species, in such a small area and in such a short time, that I am sure that any other amateur bird-watcher will not be disappointed, if he goes there on a working day and not a holiday.

\* (Ed Note: The reference to drongos attacking a Redvented Bulbul is surprising. Usually Drongos protect this species from being attacked by crows when the Bulbuls nest happens to be near their own. Crows sipping nectar from a Coral tree is in fact quite a common sight in Bombay.)

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## BROWN FLYCATCHER IN GIR FOREST

By

Lalsinh M. Raol

Early last May I was birdwatching in the Sason Game Sanctuary with the Yuvraj Shri Shivraj Kumar of Jasdan, in a particular area of the Kapuriagala which we had selected. This is about four miles from the Sason guest house. The rainfall of the previous monsoon having been very poor, nearly all the nullahs were dry, except for a small puddle in the otherwise dry bed of the Kapuria rivulet, which was surrounded by a grove. Though it was hardly ten to twelve square feet, the area attracted a variety of bird life, possibly because of the insects it harboured.

From twentyfive to thirty feet away, we watched Paradise Flycatchers, Magpie Robins, Tickell's Blue Flycatchers, White-eyes, and White-browed Fantail Flycatchers, to mention only a few. A little later a brown inconspicuous bird came in, settled on a boulder near the water, and began hawking insects from the air. The Yuvraj Saheb identified it as the Brown Flycatcher, adding that it was a rare bird and in fact that this might be the first record for Gir forest.

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### A LINNAEAN ALPHABET (Continued)

By

R.A. Stewart Mellowish

SAXICOLA, the bush-chat. Literally a cultivator of, and therefore one who dwells among, rocks. So also we have AGRICOLA, LIMICOLA, MONTICOLA, NEMORICOLA, and PRATINCOLA, which dwell in the fields, in the mud, on the mountains, in woods, and in meadows.

STREPTOPĒLIA DECAOCTŌ is the Collared Dove. The generic name is easily explained, but why deka-oktō, ten-eight? peleia is a Homeric and Sophoclean word for the wild pigeon or stock-dove, evidently from pelos, dusky, ash-coloured. streptos is a collar, properly one of twisted or linked metal, because all the cognate stroph- and strob- words have the sense of twisting or turning. strobilos, for example, is a top, or a whirlpool, or a whirlwind, or a pirouette.

SCOLŌPAX, the woodcock. skolōps is a stake or pale, and the reference can only be to the bird's long straight beak.

STAGNATILIS, the Marsh Sandpiper, is a Latin word meaning 'of or belonging to ponds'; stagnum is a pond, swamp or fen, essentially a piece of standing, or stagnant, water.

THRESKIORNIS, ibis. threskos is used in the New Testament to mean religious, and in Herodotus threskeia is religious worship. The name thus relates to the ibis's sanctity in ancient Egypt. 'Whoso slayeth an ibis or an hawk', wrote Herodotus in his description of Egypt, 'whether wittingly or unwittingly must needs die.' He tells us that the

ibis earned its inviolable status by delivering Egypt from the swarms of winged serpents which used to fly out of Arabia towards Egypt in the spring. The ibises gathered together at a certain pass through which the serpents migrated and 'suffered not the serpents to enter in, but slayed them all.' Herodotus says he actually visited the pass and saw 'serpents' backbones in multitudes not to be described'. There were bones in 'great heaps and lesser heaps and yet smaller still; and there were many of these last'.

The only Indian species of this genus is melanocephala, the White Ibis (melano- means black, and kephalē, head). But the word THRESKIORNITHIDAE is applied to the whole family of ibises and spoonbills.

TEPHRODORNIS, the wood-shrike, and other TEPHRO- words denote the colour of ashes, from tephra, ashes. On the analogy of Terpsichore, the Muse who delighted in dancing, the word TERPSIPHONĒ, used of the paradise flycatcher, means one who delights in speech. I have never heard a sound from a paradise flycatcher myself, but must evidently listen more carefully in future. Of other well known T-words, TINNUNCULUS, the kestrel, and the generic TRIMCA haven't yet made sense to me. Mr. Macleod traces TOTANUS to the Italian totano, redshank. TRERON, the green pigeons, probably comes straight from trērōn, meaning timorous or shy. treō is to flee, from fear. TROCHILOIDES, the specific name for the Dull Green Leaf-Warbler, can only come from trechein trechō, to run about. trochos is anything that runs round, hence a wheel, and trochilos, though now the Leaf Warbler, is in its Greek form the bird which Herodotus describes picking leeches out of the throats of the crocodiles in the Nile and generally, though not necessarily correctly, translated as a sandpiper. The name TROGLODYTES, for the wren genus, is the well known creature which creeps into holes. trōglē is a hole formed by gnawing, like a mouse's hole, from trōgō, to gnaw or nibble, and dutēs is one who creeps or dives into something. The classic Troglodytes were a tribe of Ethiopian cave-men. TROGON sounds like a Greek word, but I am doubtful of its real origin. Could it be a mistake for trūgōn, which is Aristotle's word for the turtle-dove, formed from the verb trūgō, to coo, or make a low murmuring sound?

UPUPA, hoopoe. Latin, and (obviously) imitative of the bird's call. Being trisyllabic, it is a more accurate rendering than the English name.

XIPHIRHYNCHUS, the slender-billed scimitar babbler. The word means sword-beaked, from xiphos, sword, and rhunchos, snout, muzzle, beak or, of an elephant, trunk. Cp. REYNCHOPS, the skimmer or 'beak-face'; and PLATYRHYNCHUS, the Mallard, whose bill is platus, broad or flat.

All but three of the entries under X in the Synopsis begin with XANTHO-, which means yellow, though Homer uses it of bay or chestnut horses too.

ZOSTEROPS, white-eye. zōstēr is a girdle or belt; ops, eye, face or countenance. Hence 'eye with a girdle or ring round it'.

(concluded)

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# BIRDWATCHING IN BOMBAY

By

V. Ravi

Some of us were in Bombay this May for the summer vacation, and found a day off for birdwatching near Aarey Milk Colony. We took a leisurely walk to the Vihar Lake area from the Colony - in all, a trek of some 5 miles. Two furlongs away from the Milk Colony we met birds for the first time. They were a pair of Tailor Birds, which species, in fact, kept us company almost throughout our walk. At a place where waste cattle fodder, full of dung, was piled in mounds, a party of Cattle Egrets was probing for insects.

On a tree nearby we were pleased to catch a glimpse of a Red-vented Bulbul. Moving a little further we came across its cousin, a Red-Whiskered Bulbul, perched on a Peepal tree. Then we heard warbler-like calls from a prickly bush, and found that they belonged to a trio of Thick-billed Flower-peckers, Dicaeum agile (Tickell), active little creatures flitting from branch to branch uttering noisy tweets all the time. One of them appeared immature.

At the Check Post on the way to the Kanheri National Park we heard the calls of the Green Barbet and the Indian Wren Warbler. We then came to a Tamarind tree where we promptly mistook a Jungle Crow for some sort of Cuckoo. Later from a dense patch of trees on a hill-side there came what sounded like the call of a Cuckoo. However, we were surprised by the sight of a Racket-tailed Drongo shooting out of the grove. Apparently the Drongo had been imitating the Cuckoo's call.

In a small valley dotted with thick clumps of trees we heard the chirrups of a group of Ioras, and found them among the foliage. A Yellow-throated Sparrow appeared amongst some tall bare trees up the hill. Some time later we took a foot-path into the forest which is the ideal habitat of the Rufous Woodpecker. We found many nests of tree-ants which the Woodpeckers usually share, but we failed to see the birds.

Near Vihar Lake we watched a Large Egret and a few Cattle Egrets at the edge of the water for some time and on our way back in some marshy land alongside the water-pipes of the Tulsi Lake we saw a pair of "Did-he-do-its", Red-vented bulbuls drinking from a leakage in the pipe lines, and one of the beautiful Jerdon's Chloropses as it dashed across from one tree into another. In a grassy swampy patch of ground we sighted what looked like a Moorhen.

\* \* \* \* \*

## CORRESPONDENCE

### Eleven species of birds feeding at a single source of food.

On 18th July at 9-30 a.m. a couple of Jungle Babblers started calling loudly from a garbage-pit in our compound at Kalladikkod Village, Palghat District. This village lies at the foot of the range of hills which separate Coimbatore District from Malabar, and has a rich avifauna. The pit is about 4 feet deep and as long and held all sorts of decaying refuse. On this morning it was a veritable fountain of the instar of termites. When I first



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feeding. A Black Drongo perched on a mango tree nearby and in the course of a number of neatly executed sallies caught many instars. Four Jungle Crows joined in and the babblers and magpie Robin moved away. The crows appeared to be in two minds whether to catch insects from the air like the Drongo or from the ground. After a few clumsy leaps the crows settled on the ground and caught instars as they emerged from the pit. Four Treepies and two House Crows joined the fray all feeding from the ground. As the treepies appeared the Black Drongo left the scene but a Racket-tailed Drongo joined in. This latter bird operated from a lower trajectory and unlike the black drongo did not return to a branch each time it had caught an instar. Three other species operated only in the air. These were, a redvented bulbul, and two each of the tailor bird and gold-fronted chloropsis. The Treepies fed on the ground but repeatedly returned to a tree.

For about 20 minutes an area of about 10 feet square around the pit was seething with activity of about 20 birds of different species each reaping a good harvest in its own style. At about 10.00 a.m. the Jungle Crows left the scene temporarily and the magpie Robin and babblers were once again seen in action. At 10.15 a pair of Scarlet minivets visited the area, but only the female caught termites. The gold-fronted chloropsis and tailorbirds operated together for a few minutes and when I visited the place at 12.00 a.m. a Jungle Crow alone was present.

Thus for a space of half-an-hour about twenty birds of eleven different species fed from the same source of food irrespective of their exact ecological niche.

D.N. Mathew  
Bombay

\* \* \* \* \*

#### Pied Crested Cuckoo

In the July issue of the Newsletter there is a discussion about dates of arrival of Pied crested Cuckoo in various parts of the country. In this connection I have to mention that in last summer vacation I was at Village Keotgama in the Samastipur subdivision of Darbhanga District of Bihar. There I observed one pied crested Cuckoo on 1st of June this year. This I think is very early date for arrival of pied crested Cuckoo. There was cyclonic rain after two days.

Kameshwar Pd Singh  
Barh

\* \* \* \* \*

#### Foster Parents

On the top of an electric ceiling fan 2 sparrows persistently and repeatedly made nest throughout the breeding season only to be disappointed every time. A week back, they managed to hatch a **chick** on their precarious perch but day before yesterday both the parents were slaughtered, one after another, by the blade of the fan as they tried to feed the chick.

There was another pair of sparrows who were always fighting with the late pair for the right of the same place to nest in. When they heard the petious cry of the young chick for food, they started hovering round it for a time and then I saw them bringing food to it. Since then they are doing their arduous duty religiously.

This is the first instance I have seen of sparrows or for that matter any other birds taking over parental duties from dead parents. I wonder if any of your reader has seen this happen.

A. David  
Delhi.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Flamingoes in Tamaraikulam

Although Mr. R.A. Steward Mellsuish's series on 'A Linnaean Alphabet' deals exclusively with etymology I feel that it would not have been inappropriate if he had mentioned the source of pigment for Phoenicopterus. I say this since I was blissfully ignorant of facts until I read Mr. J. Cyril Daniel's review on 'The Nature of Animal Colour by H. Munro Fox' in the J.B.N.H.S., vol.61 No.1 and gathered more information from Mr. Humayun Abdulali's article in the same issue. I still remember how, ever twenty years ago, as a boy, I was fascinated by the first flock of flamingoes that I ever saw. Seeing the flock alight near the 'Tamaraikulam' (= 'Water-lily pond' in Tamil) in Palamcottah\* I ran towards the side and then crawled on my belly along the paddy field bunds until I got as close as 30' to the nearest bird. The stil-like legs, serpentine neck and 'ugly' beak were strange to me despite my earlier visits to the Colombo zoo. As it generally happened whenever I saw any bird for the first time, I forgot the catapult with which I was armed, and simply lay there watching the birds take off in the fashion of airplanes running several yards before getting air-borne. The next day I visited the same site at the same time only to be disappointed at not finding them again. A helpful farmer to whom I explained with excitement the purpose of my visit told me that what I had seen the earlier day were 'Koozhakkada', evidently surmising that I had just been giving him a fanciful description of pelicans. However, I have little doubt that what I saw on that glorious day was a flock of flamingoes and I no longer wonder any I did not notice anything 'rosy' in the plumage. The pigment could have been lost during the migratory flight.

Lancelot E. Thomas  
Calicut

\* Palamcottah and Tirunelveli are contiguous municipalities

\* \* \* \* \*

## Reef Herons in the Khadakwasla Lake

In the July issue of the "Newsletter", Shri V.N. Kelkar states that he saw a Reef Heron at Poona, and Dr. Salim Ali remarks that Reef-Herons are occasionally blown inland from the coast. However, I have regularly been observing Reef Herons on the Khadakwasla lake, just 14 miles from Poona. Every winter, for the last three years, two Reef Herons have been present on the side of the lake near our house. For the first two years, both birds were slaty with a white patch on the throat. Last year, only one was slaty, the other being white with two grey blotches on the back. Is there any possibility of their being resident here?

Sudhir Vyas  
Khadakwasla

\* \* \* \* \*

## Further observations on Nest made of wire by the Common Crow

It was with amusement that I read Mr. A.S. Gilani's note on "Nest made of wire by the Common Crow". That is one bird that I never allow to nest in my compound not because I am not a birdlover but because crows insist on the area to themselves. Once they lay eggs and hatching proceeds they refuse to allow anybody to walk under the trees.

Once, a couple of years ago a crow nestling had fallen on the ground and in good faith I had gone to pick it up and restore it to its nest. It was a severe peck on the head that drew blood that surprised me and till I had entered the verandah for shelter one or the other of the crow parents swooped down to peck hard at my head and fly up again to let the other have a go. Not only was I unable to pick up the nestling but I was not even allowed to stroll in the compound without being pecked for days afterwards. Then and there I decided that that was one bird that will never nest in my garden again. The moment they start nesting I ask my maid to go up the tree and pull it down and among the sticks I find quite a large number of wire piece lengths tangled together to make a compact whole. The nesting birds fly about but do not attack the intruder at that stage. Instead, they immediately start building again at the same site and repeated pulling down of nests has resulted in no growth of crow population in my compound at least and more than anything else, no terror of being pecked unawares.

Aruna Banerji

(Ed. Note: The editor has had the same experience in his garden. In the breeding season, walking in the garden without a hat is quite a hazard.)

Apologies to Mr. Gilani for referring to him as Gilam in the last issue.

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Zafar Futehally,  
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers,  
32-A, Juhu Lane,  
Andheri,  
Bombay - 58(AS).

# NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

Volume 7 — No 9 — 1967 September



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ELEPHANTA

By

Salim Ali

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I was glad to see Mr. Mistry's note on Birdwatching on Elephan/Island in the August (1967) Newsletter because it reminded me of a useful co-operative project started with great enthusiasm in 1942 by the short-lived and long defunct 'Indian Ecological Society'. The plan was to make ecological observations as often and regularly as possible throughout one complete year at least, and preferably longer, on the fauna and flora of Elephanta Is., and if successful to extend the work to other offshore islands on the West Coast. The study was intended to cover plants, mammals, birds, reptiles, insects, and animals of as many other groups as competent enthusiasts could be found for. On our first prospecting visit to Elephanta the Ecological Society was in a force fuller than ever seen again during its transitory existence! The occasion had all the characteristics of an 'Inauguration' with which we have become so familiar in recent years. In fact it was largely in the nature of a grand picnic, and a very good time was had by all. Unfortunately very few of the persons who had loudly undertaken to study this group or that ever seriously got down to business. Except for a number of trips off and on by the botanists, few others (if any) visited the island more than once or twice (if that) during the next two years. Soon afterwards with the hotting up of the War Elephanta became a prohibited area; military barracks and defence works sprang up to take possession of the island and of course all roaming about, particularly with binoculars, came to an end. However, I see from the record of our 13 months of activity that the largest number of visits to the island was made by myself, accompanied or solo, either as day trips or overnight stays mostly on week-days when picnickers and tourists were happily absent - 19 visits in all. All the birds seen on each visit were recorded. The total number of species observed on the island over the entire period, including resident birds and migrants came to 121. Due to the manageable size of the island, the whole of it could be controlled on each visit and it can be safely claimed that perhaps not more than one or two species were missed out on each occasion. One could be almost certain of noting every new arrival or departure of migrants since the previous visit. Apart from the bare listing and checking of species, observations were recorded on nesting, food and feeding habits, and abundance, as well as changes in the weather and vegetation (flowering and fruiting of plants, etc.). It is a pity that similarly complete lists and notes were not available for the other groups of animals to enable

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The following day, on our way down to Luri, I saw a Pied Himalyan Woodpecker near Odi. The call of the Cuckoo was heard very often. Beyond Kumarsain, the altitude dropped to less than 5,000' and there was a marked change in both the flora and the avifauna. Now for the first time I saw Hoopoes, Spotted Doves, Golden Orioles and White-cheeked Bulbuls. I also saw a Lammergier gliding majestically in the sky.

Spotted doves were cooing in the garden at Luri when we woke up early next morning. I took a stroll round the garden and saw a Purple Sunbird in an apple tree. Over the river Sutlej Alpine Swifts moved in unending circles. On way to Ani, near a place called Nigam, I saw a pair of Plumbeous Redstarts sitting on a rock near a cascade. Mynahs, both brown and grey, and Black Drongos were extremely common. That evening, in the garden of the dak bungalow at Ani, I saw a few female Paradise Flycatchers, Golden Orioles and again a Pied Himalyan Woodpecker.

Koklas or Wedge-tailed Green Pigeons come to the Himalayas in early summer. Their beautiful calls, consisting of a large number of mellow whistling notes, resound through the leafy glades till about the end of July. Next morning I spotted the Koklas, a pair, sitting high up in the branches of a eucalyptus tree. I also saw some more female Paradise Flycatchers and then a beautiful adult male specimen, its silver white streamers trailing in the air as it flitted through the trees. The track to Khanag followed the banks of a stream and wound up steeply through a beautiful pine and rhododendron forest. About two kms. outside Ani, at an altitude of about 5,000' I saw two Alpine Choughs. I was surprised to see these birds at such a low altitude because in summer they rarely descend below 10,000'. (An interesting point in this connection is mentioned by Dr. Salim Ali in his book 'The Indian Hill Birds', viz. that this bird was seen by the Everest expedition of 1924, at a height of 27,000'). However, the field characters of a Chough are so distinct, that it cannot be misidentified. Later, in the Kulu valley, I again saw Yellow-billed or Alpine Choughs at an altitude of even less than 4,000'. I wonder if readers have any comment about this.

Near Khanag, I saw that gaudy-coloured, fierce-looking bird - the Great Himalyan Barbet, perhaps the biggest barbet found in India. Late in the afternoon we crossed the 10,280' high Jalori pass, and here, near a torrent, I saw a White-capped Redstart. This bird is also a resident of very high altitudes.

Next day, beyond Shoja, we saw a Yellow-billed Blue Himalyan Magpie.

This bird looks beautiful, as it comes winging across a stream flowing through a dense pine and rhododendron forest. Near Jibi, a flock of Blossom-headed Parakeets flew out from a tree, and between Jibi and Banjar we saw, for the first time, a Himalyan Golden Eagle. Beyond Banjar, the altitude again dropped below 5,000', and in place of pine and rhododendron forests there were now rocky barren mountains, with narrow strips of cultivated land on either side of the river. Here, Hoopoes, Golden Orioles and Rufous-backed Shrikes were very commonly seen, while Swifts moved in circles over the river Tirthan. Occasionally, a Chukor would be heard calling in a wheat field.

At Aut, next morning, I was again separated from my companions and the first bird I saw on entering the Kulu valley was a young male Paradise Flycatcher, its streamers and body still chestnut brown. It was building a nest in the fork of a tree. Every now and then it would dart to the ground and return to the nest holding a twig or a fibre in its bill. Later, I saw a Brown Hill Warbler and then near the river some Red-Wattled Lapwings. Further on, I saw some Plumbeous Redstarts, Eastern Grey Wagtails and then once again two Alpine Choughs. This time the altitude was even less than 4,000'. The Choughs were engaged in a game of chasing each other along the bank of the stream and flew past me a number of times. Near Nagwain, I saw a White Wagtail, a bird rarely seen in summer, and I spent considerable time observing it through the binoculars, as it fed on the ground. Late in the afternoon I reached Jhiri, where I saw a White-breasted Kingfisher. In the orchards, apples and cherries were ripening, and Golden Orioles, Hoopoes, Black Drongos, Rufous-backed Shrikes, Ring Doves, Spotted Doves, Magpie Robins and Mynahs were having a grand feast. In the wheat fields Chukors were gorging on the ripening corn.

That evening, at Bajaura, I saw, near a temple, a West Himalyan Barred Owlet. It resented my approach, and when I persisted in going closer, it flew away towards the river, shrieking with rage. When I returned to the dak bungalow I heard a Koel calling. That was the only time I heard the Koel on the tour.

Next morning on the road, near Kalhauri, I saw a thrilling jungle drama. A Jungle Crow, which was chased by a Pariah Kite, flew desperately into a tree. He must have disturbed a nest of Blue Magpies, for immediately two furious Magpies flew out and attacked him, screeching wildly. At Bhuntar, I saw some White-backed Vultures sitting in a tree right in the centre of the market place. A little later, I heard a trilling whistle and was surprised to see that it came from a White-breasted Kingfisher. I had often heard the harsh cackling of the bird, but I had never heard it whistling. Before I reached Kulu, I saw some Brahminy Mynahs, near a place called Shamsi.

In the evening, at Kulu, I saw a little Himalyan Goldfinch in the garden of the Tourist Bungalow, and later, when I was bathing in the Beas, I again saw the unforgettable spectacle of a Blue Magpie winging its way across the stream towards me.

We spent the next day in Manali and on the following day we crossed the Rohtang pass into the Lahoul valley. In snow-bound Lahoul, at altitudes ranging from 10,500' to 13,500', we saw Plumbeous and White-capped Redstarts, Eastern Meadow Buntings, Alpine Choughs, a Blue Rock Pigeon, a Mountain Sparrow, a Lammergier (and some Himalyan Mouse-Hares).

Two of my observations deserve special mention:-

- 1) All the Choughs I saw were of the Yellow-billed or Alpine type and not the Red-billed type which are supposed to be more commonly found. Again, on two occasions, I saw the Choughs at fairly low altitudes.
- 2) All the Blue Magpies I saw were also Yellow-billed not Red-billed.

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#### NOTES ON A WEAVER BIRD COLONY

By

Sarah Jameson

At one end of our compound there was a small tank, now drained, overlooked by two tall palmyra palms which have probably been used by colonies of weaver birds over many years. At the moment we have five birds together, two of which look not unlike hen sparrows, and three with bright yellow crowns. However, the illustration and description of these cock Bayas in Salim Ali's 'Book of India Birds' do not tally with the birds we have here, nor do those of the Striated Weaver Birds. The throat and breast are fulvous, shading into a light creamy beige over the abdomen and vent. There is no hint of yellow, or any striations. I have studied Whistler's descriptions of weaver birds, but these also do not tally with what we have seen here.

In Fletcher and Inglis' 'Birds of an Indian Garden' there is a fuller account of the various weaver birds, and I am wondering if our birds could be the Eastern Baya (*Ploceus infortunatus burmanicus*)\* This bird is quoted together with the Malay Baya as having a fulvous breast. The range given covers the Lower Himalayas from Nepal to Assam, as also Eastern Bengal and Burma. We are on the extreme Western edge of West Bengal, two miles from the Bihar border.

It is fascinating watching the birds at work, and the nests are slowly progressing. Many times I have seen a bird sitting on the bar across the middle of the bowl. I twice saw a bird close its wings and shoot vertically upward through the entrance tunnel of the completed nest at lightning speed. It was marvellous how it was able to stop quickly enough to avoid going through the top of the nest, of even shaking it. One evening I saw a cock sitting on an obviously very old nest, apparently doing its best to demolish it by systematically pulling out pieces of grass and letting them drop to the ground. I wonder what this means. Yesterday I saw a cock bring something round in its bill, and daub it on the outside of the nest, and when some of it fell down I saw it was damp earth. There is an interesting account in Fletcher and Inglis' 'Birds of an Indian Garden' about the use of mud. 'There is still one point to be mentioned about these nests and that concerns the lumps of clay which are stuck on to them at odd places. Jerdon notes that he found in one nest about three ounces of clay in six different places, but this is an abnormal amount, the average quantity not exceeding one ounce, and some nests containing none at all. Many theories have been advanced in explanation, a very popular one in India being that the bird uses these clay patches as 'Points d'appui' on which to stick glow-worms to illuminate the interior of the nest. A more probable explanation is that the clay is applied to balance the nest more correctly, to prevent it being blown about by every gust of wind, and to keep it steady whilst the birds are entering or leaving it.' It is sad to think that the charming idea of using lamps as glow-worms is not likely to be the right explanation!

\*But even this has the forehead, crown and nape golden yellow in breeding males -- Ed.

\* \* \* \* \*

## BIRDS AND THEIR INTUITION

By

S.V. Nilakanta.

There are many things which I do not know but take for granted. It is not essential to know much to make birdwatching such a pleasurable occupation.

Some two years back circumstances forced me to go to Visakhapatnam at the time of the Indo-Pakistan conflict. Air and train communications being disorganised I was much delayed in the flight from Bombay to Hyderabad where I missed the Express and had to go by passenger train.

The monsoon had ended but there was water everywhere. The railway embankments were breached in many places and the train was greatly delayed. There was nothing to do but bird-watch from the railway carriage windows. There were plenty of insects in the grass and rice fields on both sides of the railway embankments. A great many black and white birds were carrying grasshoppers to feed their young which appeared to be housed in palm trees. I had never seen them before and took some time to recognize them as Pied Mynas.

I confess to a partiality for the larger animals and birds and so was greatly thrilled to see an Adjutant Stork gliding down majestically in circles to alight in a rice field between other Adjutant Storks, which I had mistaken for uninteresting cultivators!

Also, my partiality for seeing birds in large numbers was satisfied by the Common Swallows which had obviously arrived in the much hotter Eastern coast of Peninsular India before arriving in Bombay. My first thought was that the winter must have arrived early where the Swallows came from. The prevailing cold with the paucity of small flying insects had probably driven the Swallows southwards.

I did not notice other winter visitors, such as small waders, either on the fringes of rice fields and wet grasslands of the Godavari or on the vast tidal basins of Visakhapatnam. Probably the waders and swallows arrive from different parts of Northern Asia where climatic conditions may differ.

Again at the end of September 1966 I was required to make a trip to Visakhapatnam. The passenger from Bombay has to make a night's halt at Hyderabad for the plane connection. Early morning, I searched the outskirts of a pond near Begumpet airport and saw a few Common Swallows although I had seen none in Bombay. No Swallows were seen in Visakhapatnam but there were thousands of small waders in the salt marshes between Visakhapatnam and the Hindustan Shipyard. Obviously the waders had plenty of food.

These observations set me thinking. Are birds like human refugees? If living conditions become impossible, do they migrate? A human refugee is led to believe by his reasoning powers that he may get a more charitable reception at the other end. A bird does not have this reasoning ability, nor does it get weather reports nor information as to the abundance of food at the other end. However, it does, in vast hordes, at the right time.

On arriving at its destination, there is no uncertainty. Food has to be in such abundance and so easily procurable that the bird quickly recovers from the exhaustion of its long journey.

All this means that before the bird begins its long and perilous flight, the right conditions have to be established at the other end.

This year the winter in Western Europe was a mild one. Even by the end of February there were signs of spring and by the first week of March spring had come to stay. Bird activity could be seen everywhere. Blackbirds were singing and proclaiming their territory, ducks were flying in pairs across the moors at Emden and I often saw kestrels hovering with rapid wing beats over some field or other.

Starlings had started building nests in holes of large trees in Germany but they were in very large flocks feeding on the ground in London airport. Generally the birds suggested furious activity as if there was no time to lose. Even small waders were splashing about North of Tynemouth.

Observation of all this activity made me realize that there had to be some kind of guarantee that the weather would not be worse, where the birds went. The birds appeared not at all bothered by rain or cold wind, but there could be no guarantee of prolonged snow or frost which would cut off the birds from their earthworms and insects. They went about their 'jobs' as though they had had prior knowledge of suitable living conditions.

Very often we read about Indian farmers who have sown their seeds at the onset of the monsoon only to find that the real rains are delayed and the newly germinated plants have to die. Such disasters cannot touch our monsoon wild plants and weeds. In fact no amount of watering can germinate most monsoon weeds. The conditions have to be just correct and guaranteed to last till the plant completes its life cycle.

Sometimes, I wonder whether careful observations of such plants and bird life would not be a better guide to local weather conditions than weather forecasts which at best can cover only the immediate future over a wide area.

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#### NOTES AND COMMENTS

In the absence of the editor, the September and October issues of the Newsletter will be edited by Shama Futchally.

The last issue contained a note by Mr. Ialsinh Raol about the Brown Flycatcher in Gir Forest. Dr. Salim Ali observes that the species has never been actually recorded from Gir itself, but 'collected in similar country in the Surat Dangs about 200 kms. to the East across the Gulf of Cambay. It is a resident species not particularly rare, and to some extent locally migratory'. We are sorry this piece of information could not be published along with the article.

\* \* \* \* \*

A news item from the 'Amrita Bazar Patrika' sent by Mr. Louis Werner from Rhubaneshwar says 'ADDING CHARM TO NANDAN KANAN LAKE'. 'The sub-committee for development has decided to take up the dewatering of Nandan Kanan Lake ..... to make it an attractive tourist spot. An amount of Rs.58,000/= has been estimated for dewatering at least half the lake. To lend charm and comfort to visitors, the famous colourful umbrellas made by the master craftsmen of Pipili are being bought. The creation of a zoological garden is also proposed in the fairy picnic spot. Large flocks of Longnecked Storks (sic) ..... dattar, teals, and jakanna (sic) add to the ethereal atmosphere'.

This kind of thing poses a new problem for conservation in India. The only thing we need to do at this stage is to stop the destruction of our natural areas. This would seem simple, but then we have not even learnt what destruction means. Negative interference with the countryside might be openly checked - if anyone tried - but where is the answer to well-meaning attempts at 'beautifying' it, which is very nearly synonymous with destroying it? For instance Ajanta has a very impressive natural setting but under the Fourth Plan it was given additional 'charm' by the construction of blue and yellow railings across the hillside, protecting insignificant plots of crotons where there used to be natural forest.

\* \* \* \* \*

With reference to Mrs. Jameson's article, readers are reminded of the monograph on Weaver Birds by V.C. Ambedkar (Reviewed in a former issue of the Newsletter). This is a very complete study of the life history of the species, published by the University of Bombay and priced at Rs.7/=.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### HERONRY AT SAMANATHAM

By

I. Perumal

Early in March this year I met a professional Shikari at Madurai, who was returning from his daily shooting trip to collect birds for the market. I asked if he knew of any nesting places of water birds, in the vicinity, which were suitable for bird photography. He directed me to the Heronry at Samanatham, a small village about  $5\frac{1}{2}$  miles from Madurai town.

Next day, I visited the heronry which is in the middle of the village and surrounded by paddy fields. Two separate clusters of banyan trees and one pipal tree form the heronry. It is regarded as sacred and the villagers take sufficient care to see that the birds are not molested in any way. There is a small temple nearby which is considered the guardian of the village and heronry. I was told that the birds are not harmed even on the tanks or nearby paddy fields.

Grey Herons - Saamba Naarai - Little egrets (Karumooku Kokku in Tamil) - Ardea cinerea (Linnaeus) and (Egretta garzetta - Linnaeus) were the only two species nesting in March. About 50 nests of grey herons and about 12 of little egrets were in the cluster of trees. Villagers told me that the number was very small as compared to the last year. The herons are said to arrive in

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Most of the nests of the herons had half and full fledged young ones. Many were trying their wings. Little egrets had fledglings of varied sizes. Some were running about the ground, being fed outside their nests.

The nests of herons were neat shallow baskets approximately 3 feet wide built in the forks of the top branches with dry thorny sticks and were lined with fine grass and egret feathers. None of the nests had more than two young ones. Parent birds were in breeding plumage. The exchange of sticks at the nest was observed. One particular bird was very conspicuous as it had red legs instead of the usual greenish brown or yellow-brown legs. The parent birds were feeding the young with fish of all sizes. Occasionally some fish dropped to the ground and the fallen tit-bits were picked up by the village urchins. I picked up a large-sized fish from the ground and found yet another smaller fish sticking out of its mouth!

Though the birds often dropped their food from the nest they did not make any attempt to retrieve it but always flew away to bring fresh food. Feeding times were few and brief. The nests of little egrets were shallow cups of sticks lined with grass built lower than that of the heron nests. The snow white birds still wore their nuptial plumes. It was fascinating watching the chicks thrust their beaks into the beaks of the parents to feed, flapping their wings and pumping their necks, accompanied by the typical noise.

I found the photography of the grey herons a most trying and difficult task. They were very shy and had built their nests 45 feet high from the ground. At the end of a whole week of patient watching and work I managed to take photographs of one nest with a young bird and a parent, by using the remote control method.

\* \* \* \* \*

## BIRDWATCHING AT DEHRA DUN AND HARDWAR

By

Vipin Parikh

Before reaching Dehra Dun we watched birds near Delhi on the banks of the Jumna where we found a host of water birds, some of which we saw for the first time. There was the stilt, our winter visitor with its long red legs, and there were also the Avocets with their long curved black bills, apart from stints and Grey and White Wagtails. We also spotted, for the first time, Pharaoh's Chicken (the Scavenger Vulture). Later at Rajghat we spotted Crested Larks, camouflaged against the earth, babblers, shrikes, Red-Whiskered Bulbuls, Green Bee-eaters, Wagtails and Hoopoes dominated the scene.

At Hardwar we saw Little Stints, Grey Wagtails, the Pied Mynah, the Indian Courser, and the Redshank and Greenshank. Climbing up to the Mansadevi temple we came across of White-Cheeked Bulbuls but nothing else. Near the canal, not far from Harki Pedhi, we saw the Common and Whitebreasted Kingfishers. At Rishikesh we saw cormorants and Purple Sunbirds mainly. Near Dehra Dun at Shahstradhra we spotted a black and chestnut robin-like bird which we could not find in the 'Common Birds' of Salim Ali. At Hardwar we came across a similar bird, but without the white patch. On coming back to Bombay and going through the 'Hill Birds' of Salim Ali we recognised them as the Whitecapped and Plumbeous Redstarts. We could not identify a type of sparrow, similar to but slightly bigger than the house sparrow, but with prominent grey patches on its wings.

\* \* \* \* \*

CORRESPONDENCE

Black-throated Weaver-bird observed at Bhubaneswar, Orissa:

It may be worth noting that on April 22, in the morning and again in the evening, I saw a small flock of the Black-throated Weaver-bird on the edge of a paddy-field that is about a mile due south of the Bhubaneswar train-station. Ordinarily I would have visited this paddy-field several times in the weeks before and after April 22, and would have been able to say whether or not the birds stayed for more than a few days, but because of ill health I have done almost no bird-watching since mid-April. I regret that ill health has also prevented me from making this report before now.

Louis Werner  
Bhubaneswar.

\*<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>\* \* \* \* \*

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Zafar Futehally,  
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers,  
32-A, Juhu Lane,  
Andheri,  
BOMBAY 58-AS.



NEWSLETTER  
FOR  
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by Vipin C. Parikh pp.13)

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TWO VISITS TO NEPAL

By

Louis Werner

A trek of 10 days from the Kathmandu Valley due north into the Helambu district and back gave a chance to see quite a few species previously unknown to me.

Alone with two Sherpas I set off early one morning by Land Rover from Kathmandu to the edge of its valley at Sunderijal from where we started to climb steadily upwards for about 3 hours to reach the rim of the encircling hills at about 8,000 ft.

The swallows in abundance hawking low across the valley floor, looking exactly like the European swallow, but with white spots at the end of the tail feathers, puzzled me at first. I realised later they were the eastern subspecies 'gutteralis' of *Hirunda rustica*.

On the climb up to the rim of the valley the Blue Throated Flycatcher (*Muscicapula rubecoloides*) was one of the commonest and certainly the loveliest of birds. Verditer and Grey Headed Flycatchers were also frequently seen.

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The monotonous call of the Blue Throated Barbets was heard but nothing like as strong or as numerous as when I came back to Nepal again briefly in late May. The Himalayan Barbet with his wilder almost raptorial-like cry seems to keep more to the thicker forests.

From 7,000 ft onwards up to about 9,000 ft. the red blossomed Rhododendron forests were in their full glory. Here the Black Bulbuls were around in noisy parties and the Black Headed Sibilas were calling their fluted notes; here too I started to see the dainty little Red Headed Tit in mixed groups with the Black Tit (*Lophophanes rufonuchalis beavani*). The Green Backed Tit and the Yellow Checked Tit seemed to stay at lower levels, as did the White Eyes, whereas the Brown Crested Tit (*Lophophanes dichrous*) I saw occasionally at the higher levels around 9,000 ft.

The little leaf warblers, as always, were difficult to identify and I needed much more time than was available to sit still and study them. The one that was abundant at all levels in suitable habitat up to 9,000 ft was, I feel sure, the Greenish Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus*) of chiffchaff colouring, distinct wing bar and faint eye-stripe - some could well have been '*P. nitidus*', which I understand is almost identical in the field. The very large numbers between 6 and 9,000 ft suggested migration northwards. A very similar '*Phylloscopus*', seen with but not as numerous as '*trochiloides*', had a faint wing bar and eye-stripe but a most noticeable yellow rump, almost like the palaearctic Bonelli's Warbler. I could not place this one at all. The Grey Headed Flycatcher Warbler was easily identified and quite numerous at the lower levels - 6 and 7,000 ft. while higher were a few Yellow Bellied Willow Warblers (*Phylloscopus affinis*), but not as many as I had expected to see. Another *Phylloscopus* I noted with a double wing bar. Could these have been '*P. inornatus*' the Yellow Browed or '*P. proregulus*', Pallas's? The former certainly winters south into India and could well have been on migration at that time.

The bird life seemed at its busiest in the Rhododendron forests around the 8,000 ft contour: Sibilas, Black and White Checked Bulbuls, the endless energy of the industrious little tits and leaf warblers. Whistling Thrushes and Blackbirds in song, nuthatches and tree-creepers, not specifically identified, up and down the tree trunks, and the Short billed Minivets whose males were lost in the riot of red rhododendrons. The Woodpeckers were there too: Fulvous Breasted Pied Woodpecker (*Dryobates macei*) with the lovely warm orange ochre breast; Brown Fronted Pied, (*D. avriceps*); and the Himalayan Pied, (*D. himalayensis*). Higher up I came upon the Scaly-Bellied Green Woodpecker, (*Picus squanatus*).

Here and higher I frequently saw small parties of about 15-20 rosefinches which were later identified as the Nepal Dark Rosefinch, (*Carpodacus nipalensis*). They were not in the denser forests, but rather where it thinned out into isolated trees or bushes and so into the open alpine pastures. It was here on the grass slopes, still brown after the recently retreated snow that I came on large flocks, well over 100 in each, of brown-streaked nondescript looking finches, with slight white wing patches, who fed and rose and circled and alighted again all together, recalling the general behaviour of Snow Finches. They turned out to be the Mountain Finch, (*Leucosticte nemoricola*).

From these open alpine pastures I had some splendid views of the Black Eagle (*Ictinaetus malayensis*) from above as well as below. The rough sketches I did on the spot give the white rump as more prominent than Salim Ali's descriptions and the flight view from below shows a most marked light or even whitish grey line all along the trailing edge of the wings. Only one Golden Eagle was seen and far fewer Lammergeiers than I'd expected.

Other birds in this region of scrub and alpine pasture, but still zonally in the temperate mixed forest belt of rhododendron and conifers, were various thrushes. The Blue Headed Rock Thrush and the Chestnut Bellied Rock Thrush were easily identified, but a large and noisy flock of birds closely resembling in looks and behaviour the European Mistle Thrush, (*Turdus viscivorus*), I could not place. I had anticipated Black Throated Thrushes but there were no signs of such markings in these, and their behaviour was totally unlike the Mountain Thrush, seen rarely in the nearby forests. Of the occasional skulking babblers and laughing thrushes, none of which were yet singing by March 20, I could only be certain of the Striated Laughing Thrush. Here were also seen several large migrating flocks of Red Rumped Swallows, (*Hirundo daurica*), and the Nepal House Martin, (*Delichon nipalensis*), which differs from '*D. urbica*' in having a black throat and squarer tail.

Beside the torrents foaming down from the melting snows or balancing on the rocks in mid stream were invariably a pair of the lovely White Capped Redstarts.

In the snow covered Rhododendron woods above 10,000 ft on the edge of the subalpine forest zone of birch, rhododendron, juniper and berberis - the snow was lower than usual for that time of the year - were several pairs of Yellow Billed Blue Magpies with their magnificent length of tail, and a brief sight of a Himalayan Rubythroat (*Luscinia pectoralis*) in characteristic wing drooping, tail cocking position on the pathway ahead. Above 9,000 ft only a few rhododendron trees were out and these were mostly the white and pink flowering varieties, whereas below 9,000 ft it was exclusively the red blossoms, (*Rhododendron arboreum*). A glimpse of a pheasant flying was too short for certain identification but probably it was a cock Impeyan.

The most beautiful of all were the Yellow Backed Sunbirds of the genus '*Aethopyga*'. Two were distinguished: '*Aethopyga gouldiae*', Mrs. Gould's Yellow Backed Sunbird and the very similar '*Aethopyga nipalensis*', the Yellow Backed Nepal Sunbird or sometimes called the Green Tailed Yellow Backed Sunbird. The latter tended to be at slightly higher elevations, about 9,000 ft, while the former were between 8,000 and 8,500 ft. Both at first sight bring a catch in the breath at the wonder of anything so small and so exquisitely fashioned and coloured. At first one just enjoys emotionally the sight of utter beauty, of colour combinations which no artist would dare - they would be certain to clash. But nature cannot go wrong, and the red and crimson, the violet and purple, the yellow and orange, the green and turquoise are all perfectly blended. Of the '*gouldiae*' I saw, only one had a flush of orange rather than crimson, as described by Salim Ali, on the yellow breast. The '*nipalensis*', when seen in perfect light, was if possible even lovelier and the colours of the back graduated down from the blue green head through crimson red to a metallic red copper colour on the middle back above the yellow rump, while the crown, upper tail-coverts and tapering tail were glistening turquoise rather than green.

This trek was not done specifically to see birds. Even so, I saw much of great beauty and variety and many that I had not time to pursue and identify - the buntings, for instance, on the open hillsides and many more forest birds.

Nepal is an ornithologist's dream with its altitudinal variations and consequent extremes of climatic and vegetational zones.

But much can be seen in a short stay even if you have to confine yourself to the valley, for splendid day trips can be done from Kathmandu. Up from Dacca on a long week end at the end of May we got up one morning at 3.30 a.m., off by 4.00 bumping along a rough track in the dark to the base of one of the highest encircling hills, Phulchawki, just over 9,000 ft. By 4.45 we started up through the lower tropical mixed forests (pipal, chestnut, pine) where at first light and before sunrise the

laughing thrushes were hilariously living up to their name and filling the forest with every imaginable shriek, whoop, chortle and chuckle - "you know who, who, who" seemed the first to greet us. I've never before heard such a cacophony of bird noises but the very discords were intensely exciting and jubilant and one caught their mood of pulsating exuberant love of life. Such moments of place and time should be crystallised and kept for ever so that we can extract them from a pocket of the mind when imprisoned in large cities or the monotonous conversation of certain other people.

The East Himalayan White Crested Laughing Thrush (*Garrulax leucolophus hardwickii*) was probably the most raucous and noisiest and that morning the Striated Laughing Thrush (*Grammatoptila striata*) the most jubilant with its fluted calls. The monotonous but rather lovely wild cry of the Great Himalayan Barbet rang out everywhere loud and echoing over the valleys.

Where the forest thinned to scrubby hillside there were the startled notes of the male and female Rusty - Cheeked Scimiter Babbler (*Pomatorhinus erythrogenys*) calling and answering as one bird. In a clearing in the forest where we rested at 8,500 ft - amongst the rhododendron and mixed broad leaved trees - we watched the lovely Yellow Bellied Fantail Flycatcher (*Chelidorhynchus hypoxanthum*) commonly heard displaying with fanned tail to his mate; and heard, on the Indian side of the Mahabharat Lek, the Hawk Cuckoo (species 'sparveroides') up to the top at 9,000 ft. The height for the latter seemed remarkable as it does not come down into the Vale of Kathmandu where 'micropterus' is commonly heard.

In Kathmandu itself in the grounds of the Royal Hotel in early June was the most colourful colony of Buff Backed Herons (or Cattle Egrets) and a few little Egrets that I've ever seen. Sixty nests I counted in one large tree; the white birds peeping out of the great purple mass of *Bourgainvillea* which covered it all over. Night Herons kept quite separate and were only just building.

Such are some of the sights and sounds in Nepal to tingle the ornithologist's blood on short walks or long treks.

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### THIRD INTERNATIONAL SHORT COURSE ON MANAGEMENT OF NATIONAL PARKS AND EQUIVALENT RESERVES

(Your Editor has recently participated in this course and the following article reproduced from the Times of India of 23-10-1967 gives a broad picture of this course)

Three years ago, a group of international institutions devoted to the conservation of nature decided to sponsor a course for the benefit of active conservationists and persons connected with the administration of National Parks. The scheme appears to have been successful, for the third international short course in administration of national parks and equivalent reserves was held this year in the United States and it has been decided to hold the fourth one next year. The main sponsors are the Department of the Interior and the National Parks Service of the USA, the Conservation Foundation, the University of Michigan and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.

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This year the course was organised as a travelling seminar, commencing at the Grand Teton National Park on August 27 and ending at Grand Canyon in Arizona on September 22. There were 35 participants from 25 countries, and I had the privilege of representing the Bombay Natural History Society. The cost of travel and other expenses were in many cases paid by the sponsoring institutions or by others like the Smithsonian Institution.

To live intimately with so many other conservationists from all over the world is in itself an education; it is quite unlike any other political or economic conference, for among conservationists the words mine or thine have no meaning. The natural assets of the earth, its scenery, wild life and historical monuments belong to everyone, and destruction or erosion of any of these anywhere is felt to be a common loss of the human race. The barriers of language were fortunately minimised because most participants knew English well.

#### NATIONAL PARKS:

The first strong impression we received of the National Park system of the USA was of the tremendous number of people who visit the parks. Last year 2.7 million people visited the Grand Teton National Park and at any one time there are as many as 6,000 persons lodged there for the night. This tremendous pressure on the park is due to the fact that the visitor season is extremely short being restricted to only about 88 days between June and September. Even so it must be remembered that the Grand Teton Park is about 125 sq. miles in area, which is almost the same size as our Corbett National Park. The Corbett Park has far more to offer in the way of wild life than the Grand Teton area. But it is unlikely that there are more than 50 visitors at any one time in the Park.

In the Grand Teton various types of boarding and lodging facilities are offered, ranging from rooms with attached baths and toilets at \$ 14 per day, to camp sites with a common bath and other facilities where one can establish a caravan. The total visitor use (to use an American expression) of all the national parks last year was 200 million persons, and the projections for the future are in a steeply upward direction.

One great problem which park concessionaries face in the United States because of the short season is that they cannot have a permanent staff. They, therefore, rely on college students during the vacation period to work in the lodges, cafeterias, laundries and other establishments of the Park during the busy season. College students get a dollar per hour for the work, and also get the opportunity to visit the most scenic places in their country. Training the students quickly to perform well in these various spheres is one of the most important tasks which the park concessionary has to undertake. From what we saw it was quite evident that Ph.Ds can become extremely efficient in serving meals in cafeterias and handling linen in hotels.

#### CONFLICT

There is always a conflict between the pure conservationist who hates the sight of another human being like himself in a natural environment and others with more fellow feeling who want the beauty of nature to be enjoyed by as many people as possible. I remember the conversation I had with a student of the School of Natural Resources, Logan, Utah State, who was doing a graduate thesis on the economics of recreation areas. It was almost with a passion that he said. "You and I like to be alone in the forest. But is it not our duty to open the eyes of millions of our countrymen to the beauty which they are missing?" I wish I could confirm that my sentiments were as generous as his.

Economics is a great handmaiden of conservation in America. By means of powerful audio visual programmes, by massive advertising in the press and the radio, by getting naturalist writers to convey their experiences of visits to parks and recreation areas, by organising package tours for the family and by constant research into what people want in the way of entertainment and recreation, visitors are drawn to all the spectacular parts of the country. Tourism in fact is considered to be an important stimulant of the economy, and 10 per cent. of the gross national product of America is ascribed to tourism.

In an instructive talk at Salt Lake City by the Director of the Bureau of Recreation, we were told that "people liked to travel; to see new places; to know in advance what to expect; people liked to stick to their plans." Based on this research, the Bureau decides which places should be "sold" to which class of client. Even inside a national park, there are places to suit all temperaments. The person who loves his automobile so much that he does not want to leave it (and there are many such) can drive to a "scenic overlook" and enjoy the view from his car. Others can fish, or climb, or hike and see the birds or animals, or water ski, or go on horseback with guides along a fixed trail. Since 99 per cent. people use only one per cent. of the more accessible parts of the park, the one per cent. who want to have a close look at nature get a large area to themselves.

An important lesson which America has to teach to the rest of the world is the necessity of a suitable conservation department at the centre. Though the Yellowstone National Park was created as early as 1872, it was really the National Parks Act of 1916 and the Department of the Interior whose Secretary virtually plays the role of a Minister for Conservation that has given such a strong lead to the conservation movement of the country. With the Department keeping a watchful eye over the whole land, priorities for land use can be logically established, and after taking a total view of the landscape it is decided to designate an area as a National Park, a National or Historical Monument a Wilderness Area, a National Forest or a State Recreation Area.

#### PRICELESS LOSS:

Such a ministry is vitally necessary in India where the pressure of population subjects every bit of land for use by a variety of interests, and where unthinking action often leads to a loss of priceless treasures forever. The National Parks Act of 1916 says that it shall be the duty of the Government "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein, and to provide for the same..... in such a manner .....as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." The only clause in our Constitution which comes close to conservation is article 38A which is now sought to be amended. This says "The State shall endeavour to organise agriculture and animal husbandry on modern scientific lines," etc.

The time has now come to insert a clause on conservation which will enable the Central Government to leave our assets unimpaired for the use of future generations not only of Indians but as a heritage for the whole world. Perhaps, we should start preparing the ground to that at the time of the General Assembly of the I.U.C.N. at New Delhi in 1969, the scheme could be discussed in its final form.

## REDSTARTS IN DEHRA DUN

by

Joseph George

H.N. Mathur has asked for information on Redstarts in Dehra Dun (Newsletter, October 1967). My observations in the 1950s were as follows:

The Black Redstart was seen in the Tons River valley near the Forest Research Institute in the last week of September. The Plumbeous and the Whitecapped Redstarts also came down to this elevation in the last days of September or the first week of October. The Whitecapped penetrated New Forest estate of the Forest Research Institute along irrigation channels in the first week of October but the Plumbeous usually did this in the third or fourth week.

The Plumbeous Redstart was always found near water but the Whitecapped had a liking for buildings, sometimes staying for several days on the shady damp northern side. One bird moulted its tail feathers in March and was usually quiet while new tail feathers were growing. It did not even call for several minutes at a time.

The Plumbeous was the first Redstart to leave the area, staying no later than the second week of March. The Whitecapped usually stayed till the first or second week of April but one year a bird was reported seen in New Forest on 29th April.

The Black Redstart was seen about hedges and dry bushy areas holding solitary territories. Females were usually more abundant than males. The last birds left the area by mid-May.

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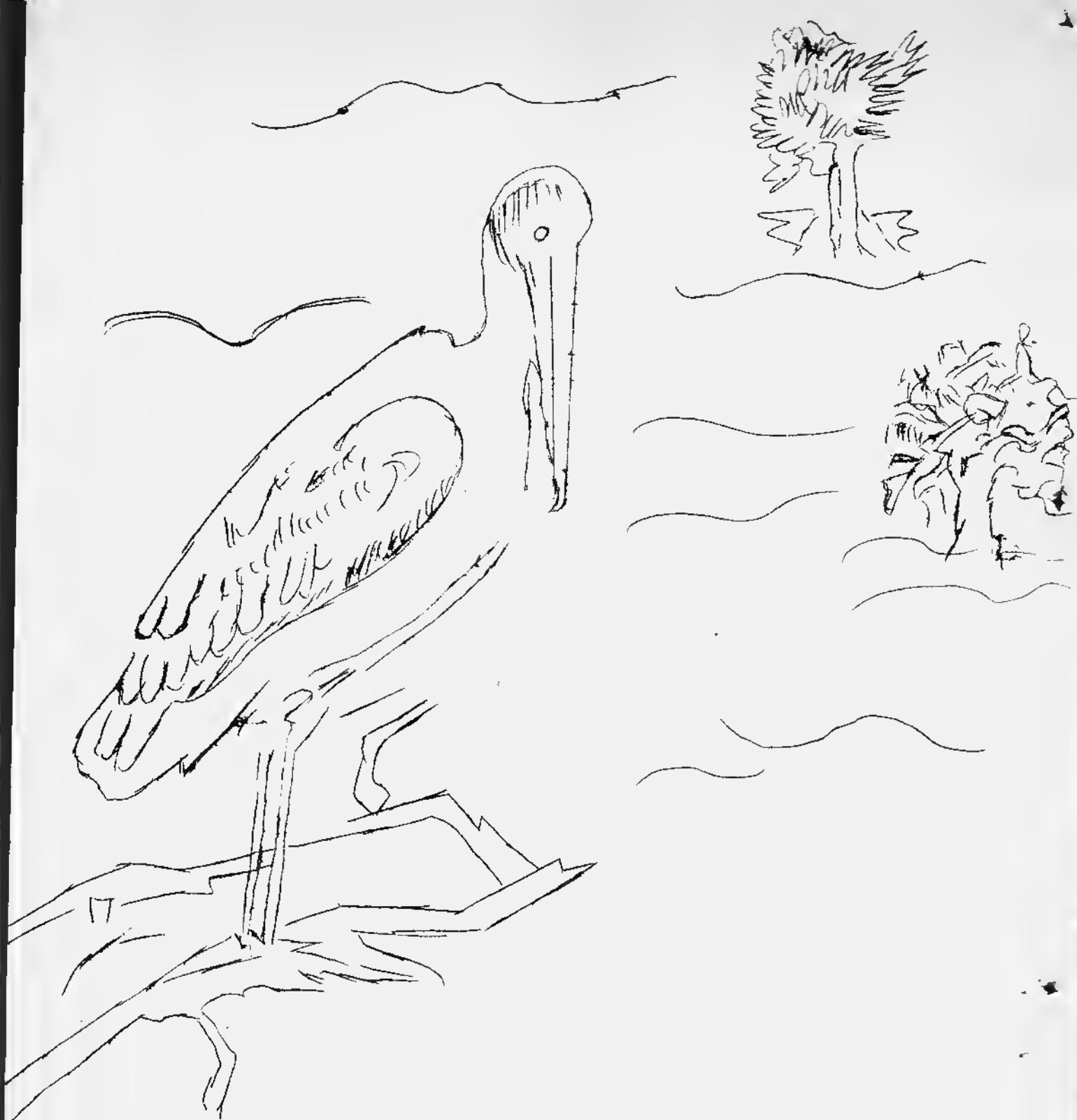
## A WEEK IN BHARATPUR

By

Shama Futehally

The main feature of Bharatpur is a large ghana or lake which is full of Acacia trees standing out of the water, overflowing with the nests of Painted Storks, Openbilled Storks, White Ibises, Spoonbills, Grey Herons, and Large Egrets. One gets an impression of millions of water birds for 'miles around', and where this exhibition ground ends - there are two or three heavily concentrated areas - the lake abounds in duck, particularly from September to March. A punt can be taken up right to the nests themselves, and, now that the nests had eggs and young, it was interesting to compare the appearance of the chicks with that of the adults. We were lucky to be able to remain for two or three hours together on a machan in the water well in the middle of thick activity.

Openbilled Stork chicks are grey and fluffy with short, thick, open beaks. The young of White Ibis are also grey and fluffy but with orangish bills; cormorant babies are black, with enormous red bag-like beaks. The young of the Painted Storks had not hatched, and neither had those of the Spoonbills, which, however, had plenty of large starched-white eggs. There were flocks of Darters on the water, and quite often a Whitenecked Stork. We watched a couple of rails - my first - skimming over the water, but it was quite impossible to locate them after they had subsided into the rushes. From the machan we also spotted a number of



Around the lake the habitat is mainly just light scrub jungle, *Acacia milotica* interspersed with *Proscopis juliflora* and *P. specigera*. The better forested areas comprise *Salvadora oleoides*, *Adina cordifolia* and *Mitrigonia parviflora*. Through these forests, bundhs lead into the lake, and here it is very easy to see Nilgai, Chital Blackbuck and Jackal, and even, if one is prepared to be grateful for any and every kind of wild life, large hares. I am afraid I don't know their species. Animals are easy to locate at this time because the much advertised floods at Bharatpur have covered the forest floor with a good eight inches of water, and animals some distance away can be heard splashing.

We went through the sanctuary on bicycle and on foot in the early mornings and afternoons. The commoner birds were the Roller, Rufous-backed Shrike, Pied Myna, and the Spotted, Little Brown, and Ring Doves. The Brahminy and Bank mynahs were common, as were Roseringed Parakeets and Green Bee-eaters.



There were two pairs of Sarus Cranes in the area, of which we found the nest of one pair. It was on an 'island' in a patch of flooded forest: about 2½ feet in diameter, quite neat and very flat, made of loose rushes and twigs. No attempt at all had been made to conceal it. Two eggs had been laid, which, contrary to the books, were pure white. We were able to watch the nest from a hide about 20' away, but unfortunately didn't get a chance to see the birds sitting. There was another nest of Blacknecked Storks not far away, with two eggs, but the birds, frightened off by too eager ornithologists, deserted it. The ghana has three types of Kingfishers, Whitebreasted, Common, and Pied, and sometimes we saw the gorgeous sight of a Pied or a Common Kingfisher 'hovering'. Spotted Owlets were very frequently seen at night, perched on odd stumps or telegraph wires; on one occasion we heard a Brown Fishing Owl calling from across water, presumably from one of the trees in the lake. The call is a low-pitched, rather devilish crescendo.

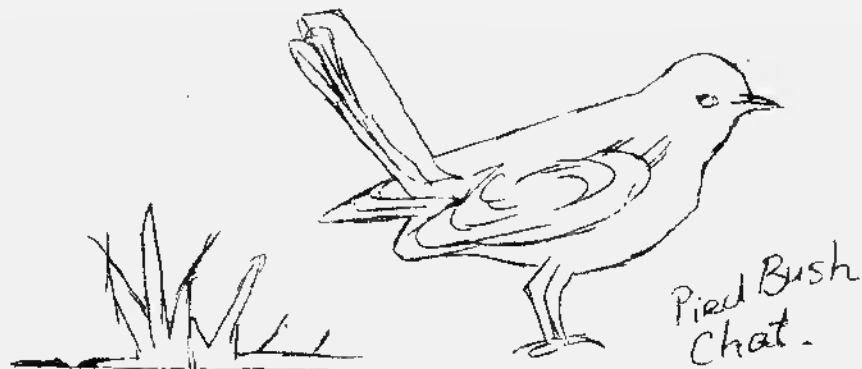


Numerous and nondescript warblers were as frustrating as always and the only one I could identify with any certainty was the Blythe's Reed Warbler which was rather common - On several occasions other people saw Syke's Tree Warblers and I did not. I did see another plumpish warbler which I have described as 'Grey, with black head, black-and white striped edges to wing and tail, pale buff underparts; this just may have been the Orphean Warbler which ~~has~~ has been seen before, and once in fact caught for ringing. Blackbellied or Ashycrowned Finch-larks and Crested Larks lined the sugar cane fields outside the ghana. I only once saw a group of Whitecheeked Bulbuls on an Acacia near the main road: plenty of occupied Weaver bird colonies, and coveys of Grey Partridges. There were two or three solitary Pied Crested Cuckoos, many Rufous-tailed Finch-larks, and, as the migrant birds were arriving, male and female Redstarts, Grey Wagtails, and flocks of European swallows, though there were Redrumped swallows as well. Walking along the bundhs during the late afternoons one became used to continual 'Whoosh' sounds overhead as wave after wave of duck, mainly Nukta and Cotton Teal, on sometimes Night Herons, flew to their feeding areas.

It was on one of these occasions that a friend and I saw a family of Purple Moorhens, the parents with two chicks. Later the hen sat down among the reeds, probably on a nest which we couldn't see. In about the same sort of habitat in another part of the sanctuary we also noticed a family of Indian Moorhens, but that was with more chicks, five or six. Another nest we saw on the lake was that of a Little Grebe. It was recognisable as a nest, but had neither eggs nor young just then. One of the members of the camp saw a pair of Cotton Teals emerging at different times from a hole in a tree, where they probably had a nest, but it was too high to be reached.

Once a Short-toed Eagle flew quite low over where the banding was, from underneath, looking like a squat white eagle with black edges to the wings and under the chin. Oddly enough we only saw a Shikra once. On one occasion some-one else came across a Pallas' Fishing Eagle badly mauling a Garganey Teal which had been ringed only that morning: this

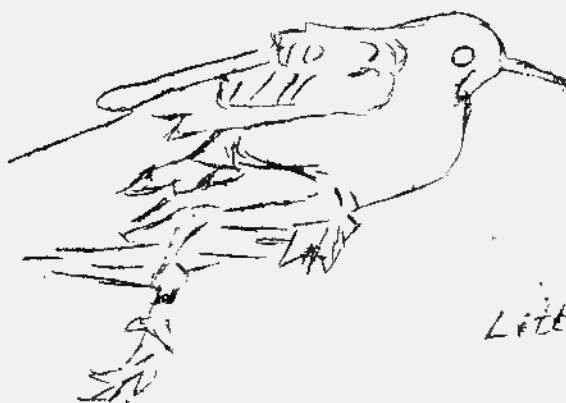
was some distance away from the banding. Finally the eagle abandoned the dead teal and the ring was destroyed.



Pied Bush  
Chat.

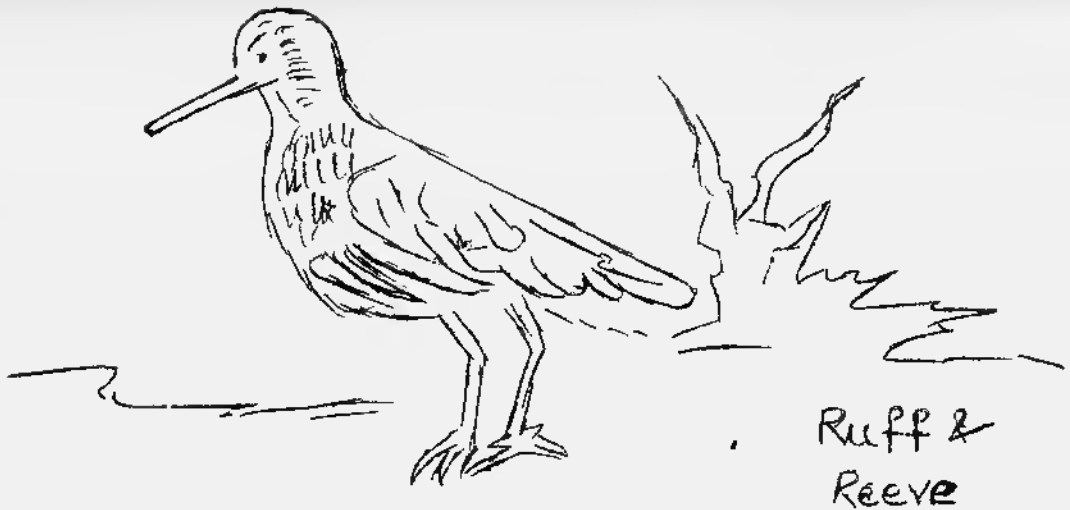
I saw my first Stone Curlew in a patch of scrub, its colour blending perfectly with the straw-coloured grass behind, and conspicuous only because of the white eye-stripes. I was very happy to see two or three Blue-tailed Bee-eaters together with the larger bodied, bluish tails, and chestnut throats; I missed the black stripe across the cheeks, but am not prepared to take that into consideration. Red-wattled Lapwings were very common: one or two Indian Pittas, and, in the thicker woods, Golden backed Woodpeckers and Treepies. Spotted and Common Sandpipers were found near patches of water in fairly well forested areas. Hoopoes, Indian Robins, Rufous Turtle Doves, Purple and Purple-rumped Sunbirds, Tickells Flower peckers, and Peafowl were found at every turn of the road, and there were a number of Whitebrowed Bulbuls. Bay backed Shrikes and Racket-tailed Drongoes were not very common, but seen once or twice, and once we saw a solitary Grey Shrike guarding a freshly killed mouse suspended on an Acacia thorn. Common Ioras and Pied Bush Chats were easily seen from the main road. A pair of White-browed Fantail Flycatchers were probably breeding near the Rest House.

I was at Bharatpur for about the first ten days of October with the Bombay Natural History Society bird-banding camp, and during that time 150 to 200 birds were ringed every day, and half the number were ticked. The ducks were caught at night by 'mir Shikaris' from Bihar by an intriguing method using lanterns and nets on moonless nights.



Little Stint.

The majority of the waders ringed were Ruff and Reeve, Spotted Sandpipers, Little and Temminck's Stints, Blackwinged Stilts, Fantail Snipes, Jack snipes, once a Large Fratincole, Painted Snipe, and Little Ringed Plovers. No ticks were found on any of them. The ducks were mainly Pintail, Spotbill, Garganey Teal, Nukta, Common Teal, and a few Coot. All the ducks were bled so that the blood discs can be sent to Siberian laboratories and tested for evidence of blood diseases which these ducks may be transmitting to human beings. Of course all these birds were commonly found on the water as well, particularly Ruff and Reeve.



\* \* \* \* \*

#### NOTES AND COMMENTS

##### TREES:

The speeches that are made on the occasion of VAN MAHOTSAV are cheering, but what is more important is the necessity of careful follow up action to preserve the saplings which are ceremonially planted every year. We might follow the example of U.K., and insist on detenent penalties on persons who are negligent about looking after trees. The following quotation from HABITAT Vol 3 No.9 of September 1967 indicates the position.

##### "Trees and the Civic Amenities Act 1967 - new powers

The Minister of Housing and Local Government and the Secretary of State for Wales have drawn the attention of all local authorities in England and Wales to the new powers given to them by the Civic Amenities Act. A circular issued on 8 August which deals, among other things, with the effects of the Act in respect of trees and tree preservation (Part II of the Act), states: 'Trees are often destroyed unnecessarily in the course of development. The developer may have no interest in preserving them, while the planning permission may not have taken account of the desirability of protecting them. The Act requires local planning authorities when granting planning permission to make sure (wherever appropriate) that adequate conditions are imposed for the protection of existing trees on the site or for the planting of new ones. The Ministers urge them to pay careful attention to this new obligation, to take all steps to inform themselves about existing trees on building sites and to see that proper conditions, preferably reinforced by tree preservation orders are attached to their permissions!'

Section 13 of the Act requires that trees covered by preservation orders be replaced if they die or are removed and that the original orders should continue to protect new trees. Maximum penalties for serious contraventions are increased. Fines of up to £250 or twice the value of the tree, whichever is greater, may be imposed. The Ministers hope that local authorities will take full advantage of these new powers. They believe that at least in some parts of the country there is scope for more vigorous action. Although the number of tree preservation orders has grown in the last few years are some areas where none at all have been made but where there is certainly preservation work to be done.

'The Ministers are concerned also about the steady disappearance of hedgerow trees in some parts of the country. Modern agriculture needs larger fields and there must be some losses in hedges, but the effect could be greatly reduced by a readier use of tree preservation orders to preserve or replace trees that are too often involved in these operations and whose disappearance is such a loss to landscape! "

\* \* \* \* \*

The President's letter from the International Council for Bird Preservation contains the following extract:

#### Feeding ground for Flamingoes - India

'Kumar Shree Dhannakumarsinhji writes that he finds the salt compartments of the salt pans in some parts of Saurashtra offer better feeding grounds for Flamingoes and are a source of extra food supply. There are innumerable salt works in the Saurashtra Peninsula and it is possible that they have attracted more Flamingoes than would otherwise have been the case. When the compartments dry, large numbers of birds seek other feeding grounds on the coastline and in inland waters.'

\* \* \* \* \*

Sir Landsborough Thompson, known to the ornithological world for his phenomenal editing of A NEW DICTIONARY OF BIRDS, was in Bombay in the third week of October. During this time he gave an address at the Bombay Natural History Society about the Dictionary. Sir Landsborough said that over 200 persons collaborated, and it was remarkable that there were no more than two "defaulters". Sir Landsborough has been recently appointed Chairman of the British Museum (Natural History).

\* \* \* \* \*

#### CORRESPONDENCE

##### Black-bellied Finch larks

The following observations of mine may be of some interest to others.

We live on the left Bank of the Mahanadi River a mile downstream of the Hirakud main dam.

A few pairs of Black-bellied Finch-larks have been visiting our weekly lice "Haat" every Sunday. They have been observed by me gleaning rice around the bullock-carts every haat day for the past 6 months. But on no other days have I been able to locate them anywhere around. They have been **located** on the roadsides about 4 to 5 miles away from our colony.

I wonder how they time their visit to this place; whether they do it by instinct or follow the bullock-carts coming in, is a mystery to me.

M.R. Ray  
Hirakud

\* \* \* \* \*

### Discipline among Black-winged Bengal Vultures

In the Calcutta suburbs, one<sup>thing</sup> has drawn my attention: the 'team spirit' and discipline among the Blackwinged Bengal Vultures.

Several times I have observed these vultures waiting keenly for the carcase of some dead domestic animals which people leave in one particular place near the railway track. Some are usually on the ground/vultures and some others in the sky. As soon as a dead animal is dumped there, the group on the ground approaches it and waits for the winging birds.

Then one of the vultures which I presume to be the leader, tears off a piece of the flesh majestically while the rest watch. The leader then leaves his share on the ground a little way away and flies off, while the rest commence to feed.

M.P. Mukherjee  
Calcutta

\* \* \* \* \*

### Birds attacking their Reflections

Surely, many readers would respond to your call for information on this topic. Here is my contribution.

Two dressing mirrors in our house at Palamcottah were covered with lace curtains to avoid damage from house-sparrows which pecked violently at their own images. When the elders were away we used to unveil the mirrors and enjoy the farce. Our entertainment was augmented by planting hand mirrors in boughs frequented by bulbuls and inducing similar reactions. All these birds were aggressive only during the nesting period and they appeared to be incapable of perceiving the real nature of the 'intruders'. One feels that serious students of animal behaviour might already have made detailed investigations in this field and published their findings in scientific journals.

In passing, I am amused to recall that at one time I believed that king-fishers dive headlong into calm waters attacking their own images! Who can say? The pond heron contemplating for hours over his image in halcyon waters is the real Narcissus and not the flower that bears his name today.

Lancelot E. Thomas  
Calicut.

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### Redstarts at Dehra Dun

Shri M.N. Mathur's conjecture in October 1967 issue regarding our visit to Hardwar-Dehra Dun is correct. We visited Dehra Dun in the last week of December, 1966 when we spotted the Redstarts there. I am sorry I do not have the exact date of our stay.

V.C. Parikh  
Bombay

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Zafar Futehally  
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers  
32-A, Juhu Lane,  
Andheri, Bombay 58-AS.

# NEWSLETTER

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## FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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Volume 7 - No. 12 - 1967 December



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THE HOUSE SPARROW

By

V. Ravi, President, Nature Study Club, Guntur.

(In this note we are giving an outline, in a general way, of the nesting behaviour of the House Sparrow. Dr. Salim Ali's appeal for a thorough study of this very common and important bird of the human environment, as well as D. Summers-Smith's interesting monograph on it, stimulated us to make such an attempt. The latter book helped us generalize some statements by comparing our rather meagre observations with the substantial ones made by the author. Thus, though our knowledge of how a pair begins nesting is not very wide, we could form an idea of its general nature. Most of our study concerns a few established pairs, all nesting in one house. In this note we deal with the period from nest construction onward to the feeding of the young. We also give an account of the bird's other social activities).

NESTING:

(a) Construction: An experienced cock bird begins by looking into every possible hole and corner in the house till it finds a suitable site. Ready-made sites, such as nest boxes, are readily adopted. A hen is attracted to the site, usually in two or three days. Once the hen approves of the site chosen by the cock, the construction of the nest commences. A cock with two or more sites under consideration seems unable to decide which is the more suitable, and fails to have a nest built at all. One

particular male bird with an unsuitable site was unable to secure a mate for a long time. Again there are pairs which leave half-built nests, not being satisfied with them, and then change their site to begin again. They may remain unsuccessful for years together.

The nest is made of grass, straw, coir, coconut fibre, ribs of pinnate leaves, etc., depending on what is readily available. The inside is lined with softer fibres; feathers, cotton and string. Wherever possible, domed nests are built, as mentioned in Summers-Smith's book "The House Sparrow".

Generally it takes two or three weeks for a pair to complete the nest. Pairs have been known to build it in less than a week, and even start laying within that time. Birds which do not fully attain breeding condition in time, we think, delay the work for days or even months. An 'old' pair, rather too old to breed, collects material and takes it to the nests of other breeding birds. A senile pair which has an earlier nest of its own uses it for regular roosting.

The cock has an important role in the collection of the building material. In the first few days the work goes on at a rapid pace as the builders merely fill the chosen site with material in large quantities. Sometimes a sparrow builds a nest on the mere support of an electric wire pinned to the corner between two walls! In such places the birds work hard and stuff large masses in the corner in order to make a stable base to build on.

(b) Mating: When the nest is nearly completed, mating begins. Birds with old nests re-line their nests and at the same time indulge in coition. This activity is seen at the nest and away from it, too. Sometimes the hen avoids the cock if it keeps trying to mount her. Ordinarily, though, it is she who invites the cock bird to do this. The sight of one pair indulging in this activity seems to tempt the neighbouring ones to make attempts (often premature and unsuccessful).

(c) Egg-laying: It is normally within a week or ten days of the mating that the eggs are laid. The hen bird sleeps continually in the nest for a few days before laying. The usual clutch consists of four eggs, apparently laid at the rate of an egg per day. We noted no nest with five eggs. The incubation period is fourteen days from the day the first egg is laid. While the hen does most of the incubating, sometimes the cock sits on the eggs for a couple of minutes, considerably giving the hen a break.

(d) Feeding the chicks: During the first few days the chicks are supported on insect-food consisting of caterpillars, mealworms, flies and ants. This is gradually replaced by an entirely vegetarian diet, and the nestlings are later fed largely with kitchen scraps. Cooked rice and pulses seem to be favourite foods. When there is adequate light (as from an electric lamp) night-feeding is also done by the hen.

Two or three chicks survive out of the four. One chick usually dies in the naked stage, and the dead body is carried out and dropped by the parents. We noticed sometimes young birds did fall off alive, but when they were returned to the nest they were accepted by the parents.

By the tenth day the pin feathers are well opened and cover the naked chick. The young birds stay in the nest for 15 to 18 days, and sometimes up to three weeks.

(e) Later days in the nest: In the last few days of the young bird's nest life the cock goes into a feverish display and follows the hen noisily, not helping much in feeding the chicks. In his book Summers-Smith says that the purpose of this behaviour is to urge the young birds to come out. However, what we are led to infer is that the cock makes advances to the hen for re-mating - for the next brood. Finally the parents guide the chicks out by stages to some nearby bush. Young birds that leave the nest at the regular time are not



as strong fliers as those which linger a few days more. The parents take care of the fledglings for another 2 weeks, or possibly three; only one of the parents appears to attend to them, not both.

(f) The next brood: As soon as one brood is raised, the pair prepares for the next, and in this way it is capable of raising as many as 7 broods a year. As a pair ages the capacity for raising broods possibly decreases. If a brood fails, with the young dying either in the nest or after fledging, another clutch is laid to make up for the loss. Once, in such a case, only a single egg was laid.

(g) Breeding season: The breeding season appears to be very long, extending from July to May of the following year. During the short period in which the breeding ceases the birds go through an "annual moult".

(h) Partnership: Usually a pair remains together from the beginning unless one of the birds dies. If this happens while there are chicks in the nest (and it was usually the hens we saw die at this stage) the other ordinarily carries on with its duty, and takes a new mate later on. But there is a case where the cock took on a new mate at once, leaving the chicks to their fate. One particular cock changed 4 or 5 hens in the course of 3 years, while another, in just as long a period, changed none.

We also noted a tendency among the birds towards bigamy. This has usually happened when the hen of a neighbouring nest lost her first mate. Only after some dispute with the two hens did the cock secure the second mate. Of the four cases we had occasion to observe, only one cock was able to breed successfully with both hens and raise two broods simultaneously. The cock helped neither of them much but left each to take care of its own brood.

It was by a curious circumstance that this cock became bigamous; as another cock with two mates died, this bird adopted one of the dead cock's mates. This bird now wanders about with its two mates following it.

#### OTHER SOCIAL ACTIVITIES:

We have recently been making some interesting observations on the social behaviour of the bird. The most important perhaps is its roosting habit, many birds roosting together in a suitable tree. At first this appeared to be an irregular habit, the roosts appearing at no definite times of the year, and the sites changing. Later we realised that a regular communal roost is formed in winter. We learnt from Summers-Smith that small roosts are also found in summer; but this is not remarkable, as the sites are shifted. We have big winter roosts near our house where hundreds of sparrows from a large area gather.

There is a certain procedure by which the birds move to the roosting tree. The birds first collect (usually at about 5 p.m.) in small groups at various points, on various trees in the nesting area, the Amla tree (*Emblica officinalis*) being the "collecting point" for the birds from our house; they then pour into the main tree from all directions. They do not at once settle down, but keep flying in and out for about an hour, accompanied by deafening twitterings. Some birds move away from the tree somehow. Hen birds also share the roost except when they are breeding.

There is a common display amongst sparrows which D. Summers-Smith terms "communal display". This consists of three or four cocks courting a single hen in an extravagant manner. They suddenly burst out from somewhere amidst noisy twitterings and drop down on to the ground. The cocks circle around the hen and go mad with self display while the hen tries to get rid of them. She pecks any cock which approaches too near, and sometimes seizes the bird by its head feathers. The Newsletter once published a report from the U.S.A. of a similar instance in which the hen

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There is a certain procedure by which the birds move to the roosting tree. The birds first collect (usually at about 5 p.m.) in small groups at various points, on various trees in the nesting area, the Amla tree (*Embllica officinalis*) being the "collecting point" for the birds from our house; they then pour into the main tree from all directions. They do not at once settle down, but keep flying in and out for about an hour, accompanied by deafening twitterings. Some birds move away from the tree somehow. Hen birds also share the roost except when they are breeding.

There is a common display amongst sparrows which D. Summers-Smith terms "communal display". This consists of three or four cocks courting a single hen in an extravagant manner. They suddenly burst out from somewhere amidst noisy twitterings and drop down on to the ground. The cocks circle around the hen and go mad with self display while the hen tries to get rid of them. She pecks any cock which approaches too near, and sometimes seizes the bird by its head feathers. The Newsletter once published a report from the U.S.A. of a similar instance in which the hen held the cock dangling from her bill. The communal display usually occurs

the roosting birds in winter. During early summer this year (1966) we did not observe any such activity. But from the beginning of July we could see it again. Now (at the end of July) this has become frequent. June-July is also a good time for observing their social behaviour as the breeding ceases and the birds are free. At that time we noted how the sparrows (about half-a-dozen or more pairs) colonising in our house formed a single group and foraged in the compound. If one bird stops feeding and becomes busy preening itself the rest follow suit, as they do when one leading pair stops and return to its nest.

N.B.:- THE NATURE STUDY CLUB, GUNTUR INVITES, AND WILL BE GRATEFUL FOR, COMMENTS ON THE OBSERVATIONS RECORDED HERE.

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#### BIRDWATCHING AT SAYLA

BY

Lalsirih M. Paul.

It is surprising to see how confident such wary birds as Cranes can become. As is well-known, Common and Demoiselle Cranes are cautious birds. But I saw hundreds of Demoiselle Cranes resting quite unperturbed hardly thirty feet away from women washing their clothes, on a lake in the outskirts of Sayla, a small town in Surendranagar Dist. Though there were about a thousand Demoiselle Cranes resting in groups, I could not find even a single Common Crane there during my birdwatching of two days on the 10th & the 11th March 1967.

It was my long pending desire of watching birds on that lake. I therefore seized the opportunity of doing so in March this year. But I was a little late for it. I should have gone there in January, for the number of migratory birds on the lake had decreased considerably, particularly this year, as reported by my cousin who practises there.

The lake at Sayla is an old one and much of its area is now shallow due to years of silting. This provides a favourable feeding ground for many of our surface feeding ducks, migratory as well as resident. There is no such other lake nearby. So, many species of migratory birds are attracted by it. As the lake is right on the outskirts of the town, only a dare-devil could afford to shoot the game birds and thus to incur the wrath of the predominantly vegetarian population of the area. Hence birds enjoy comparative protection from the so called trigger-happy sportsmen. As a result, birds were not scared by the hustle and bustle of the busy little town.

I could see Spotbills and Garganeys swimming leisurely only twenty feet away from where I was watching them. Sunlight being favourable, it was a pleasure to watch geese and ducks of various species from such a short distance with the help of a pair of field glasses. Fine details of their markings and delicate shades of their colours were really captivating. Equally attractive was their apparently effortless gliding in the water. Somehow, the sight of ducks swimming in water has great attraction for me.

Dabchicks were conspicuously absent. Not a single one was found on the lake where they were in good numbers some days back as was reported by my cousin.

The difference in food-getting habits among the ducks was strikingly apparent. Diving ducks like Pochards & Tufted Pochards were frequenting the comparatively deeper portions of the lake, which Pintails, Spotbills, Common Teals, Garganeys, Shovellers, Wigeons and Cotton Teal were spread over the shallower portions.

Snipe and Purple Moorhens were common but the Moorhens could not be sighted there by me. I was delighted to see Spotted Redshanks, as that species was a new addition to my list. Ruddy Shelducks have been reported on that lake but were not seen on my visit.

Among the birds of prey I saw a Short-toed Eagle and a female Marsh Harrier. Another eagle I saw there could not be identified as it was sitting on the dried up portion of the lake far away from me.

One dead Demoiselle Crane, floating on the water, was dragged out by two local boys. It had received injuries on the nape. As reported by those boys it was killed by an eagle on the very morning some time before my arrival.

This lake at Sayla is really a very good place for observing ducks, waders and other waterbirds at close quarters.

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#### BIRD NAMES

By

S.V. Nilakanta.

It is, of course, accepted that each species of bird should have its own distinctive name so that we can identify them in speaking or writing about them. This seems to have been achieved with some difficulty in the English language. When it comes to various Indian languages, several birds go by the same name and a vast number of birds which are strangers to the region are not named at all.

However, this need not bother us as each species and sub-species has been given an international Latin name by experts on the subject. One would expect these names to have been chosen with great care, so that the very name would immediately suggest the bird. Unfortunately this is not so. For instance the 'Purple Sunbird' is more suggestive than Nectarinia asiatica. The distribution of this bird seems to be over such a vast area that a reference to it seems to have no particular significance. On the other hand, 'the Purplerumped Sunbird', which is again a good English name is known as N. zeylonica as though it is confined to that island. The worst of all is Loten's Sunbird (N. lotenia) which is named after a person when its distinguishing feature is its bill which appears to be so disproportionately large. The epithet macrorhynchos, (used for the Jungle Crow), although coarse sounding, would perhaps be more descriptive.

In fact, so many of these scientific names are anyhow meaningless to a person like me unless a scholar like Mr. Molluish explains them. One just has to memorize the names like memorizing numbers. Perhaps each bird has been given a number so that computers can easily accept them. Once again these numbers while providing positive identity will be a very dry and non-descriptive way of naming and as such either never learnt or quickly forgotten by an average person.

In the end it is found that it is more convenient to remember the English names which are often extremely apt and conjure a vision of the birds so named. Consider, for instance, Blackbellied Finch-lark and Pied Crested Cuckoo. In other cases we are a little misled, especially when we are prone to jump to conclusions.

A few weeks back we had paid our first visit to the nearby hill stations of Matheran. One evening an all black bird flew up and sat on the gate post of our compound. At first it appeared to be a diminutive male Koel as its entire attitude was rather furtive. The bird did not appear to be bothered by us but by something else which soon came around the gate post in the shape of a cat. Even in the poor light it was noticed that

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near the size of a Koel and flow off with a high pitched screech. Then, we suddenly recognized it as the Malabar Whistling Thrush. It was the first time we had seen this bird but somehow we had made up our mind that it belongs to Malabar and such far off places that we were not willing to recognize it when seen in Matheran.

Last winter when we were gazing across Juhu swamp we saw vast flocks of waders. The shorter legged ones were close to us and the longer legged ones like Blackwinged Stilts were far away. We had seen these so many times that we had already made up our minds as to what we were going to see. It is only when somebody else pointed out we were able to notice a group of Avocets among the Stilts.

Coming back to names, I have decided that I will lightly pencil my own version of the birds name, where I think it is more apt, on the pages of my bird book. The Malabar Whistling Thrush will also be known as the Blackbilled Whistling Thrush to distinguish it from the Yellowbilled Himalayan one. Such descriptive names, I hope, will enable me to identify Sandpipers in the field.

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ON THE FOOD OF THE WHITEBACKED MUNIA  
Lonchura striata (Linn).

By

N.G. Pillai.

Seeds and grains of various kinds form the principal food of munias. So it came altogether as a surprise to me to see a party of whitebacked munias feeding from a patch of green algae on the bed of a ditch from which rain water had nearly dried up.

On the morning of 9.9.1967, I was crossing a rice field in the eastern outskirts of Ernakulam, not far from the Caltex Oil Installations. Actually it was no rice field at all, since large quantities of sand and earth were being dumped into it to raise its level for conversion into a housing site. The ground was all churned up and deeply rutted with the wheel-tracks of the wagons which brought the earth and humps and ditches and hollows lay everywhere. There was rain water in these depressions and some were drying up exposing a moist bed matted with green algae.

As I came upon one of these hollows, a small party of whitebacked munias, suddenly flew down from their perch on the nearest telegraph wire and settled on the muddy ooze. Just as I froze in my tracks, to disturb them as little as possible, I saw them peck at the algal patch and from where I stood hardly 6 feet away, I could clearly see a strand of green filament going down the beak in the bird nearest to me. The other birds hopped about and seemed to enjoy themselves immensely. But the sound of approaching footsteps soon put a stop to their activities and sent them scurrying from their meal.

My first impression was that the birds had hopped down to the hollow to slake their thirst or enjoy a bath on that sunny morning. Had I not seen the green scum being pecked at and a green strand actually going down the beak of one of the birds I would have taken them to be only drinking, even though there was only a trace of water in the hollow. Perhaps they were, only the alga was swallowed inadvertently. But nearby there were also other depressions which still held water, where the birds could have had their drink free of the annoying weed. Or, do they have a liking for an algal diet on occasion?

As I turned homewards with these thoughts in mind, I could not help recalling how on an earlier occasion (21.10.1966) I had come upon a

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As I turned homewards with these thoughts in mind, I could not help recalling how on an earlier occasion (21.10.'66), I had come upon a pair of Blackheaded Munias. *Munia malacca* (Linnaeus), on the bed of

one of several channels on the southern Ioresnore which exptied into the Cochin Harbour. As it was low-tide then, the stream was no more than a trickle and its exposed bed was black and encrusted with mud. The birds were on the ground, fairly close to the water's edge and seemed just resting. The ideal haunt for a sandpiper or a large pied wagtail, the spot looked to me rather unusual for a munia to be in, but I had assumed them to have come down for a drink. However, disturbed by my presence, they had taken off and flown into a sea-holly patch that stood in a swamp by the road farther up. Here were several more of their comrades whom they joined and I had watched them for a few minutes before they finally disappeared into the depths of the swamp. That the exposed bed of the streamlet had a streak of green alga then flashed into my mind. Had the munias come in quest of this weed?

Dr. Salim Ali in his Birds of Travancore & Cochin (P.151) refers to the swamp loving nature of this munia which I can confirm, but in the case of the whitebacked munia where it is stated that it is not addicted to sumpy ground, my experience is that it may be met with occasionally in this type of terrain too. The Spotted Munia - Lonchura punctulata (Linn.), another species occuring in this area, was also noted in the same locality as the whitebacked munia - a water-logged place bordered by home-steads and the haunts of pond herons and sandpipers. This munia was building in the heart of a screwpine standing on the edge of a pond and on 3.6.'67, there was a nest about 6 feet above the level of water. Has the swamp loving nature of these munias anything to do with their fondness for an occasional diet of green algae? The algal slime found in the puddles was identified as a species of Sprogyra with an admixture of diatoms by Professor R.S. Iyer, Head of the Department of Botany, Maharaja's College, Ernakulam, to whom my grateful thanks are due.

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#### THE HIMALAYAN PIED KINGFISHER (Ceryle lugubris)

By

Dr. J. Allison and E.W. Ramble

Very little appears to have been written about the Himalayan Pied Kingfisher in any of the popular handbooks of Indian Birds.

Readers would perhaps find our joint observations of some interest and we would be glad if other observers could add to them in the Newsletter.

The bird could be described as a large, grey kingfisher, the size of a rock pigeon generally to be seen sitting on rocks, overhanging trees, roots projecting from river banks or masonry along canals.

At rest the bird regularly cocks its short square tail and raises its crest which is clearly double when fully erect.

It is normally a silent bird but sometimes utters a single sound ... "KICK" accompanied by an upward flick of the tail.

The flight is very fast and straight, within two feet of the water. They splash into the water from this height to catch small fish; then shaking themselves they fly to the rocks where they proceed to beat the little fish and subsequently swallow it. Occasionally, but not very often, we have observed them to hover like the lesser pied kingfisher. Their fishing generally is straight off a rock, from about two to three feet, or from some other convenient perch.

We have not observed the bird to feed on insects off the land, all food being taken from the water.



It appears to resent the lesser pied kingfisher in its territory and can often be seen harrying its smaller cousins, robbing them of their prey or merely chasing them about.

It is not a timid bird and it is possible to approach and watch it from quite close provided no sudden movement is made.

While Salim Ali and Whistler rather infer in their books that the bird is to be found more or less about 2500 ft., it is not uncommon in the Doon on the rivers Jumna and Ganges. We have seen them as far down as the western Jumna Canal at Tajewala which must be a good ten miles from the Himalayan range and four miles south of the Siwaliks. On the Ganges they have been noticed as far down as Raewala and in the Jachhiwala forest below Hardwar.

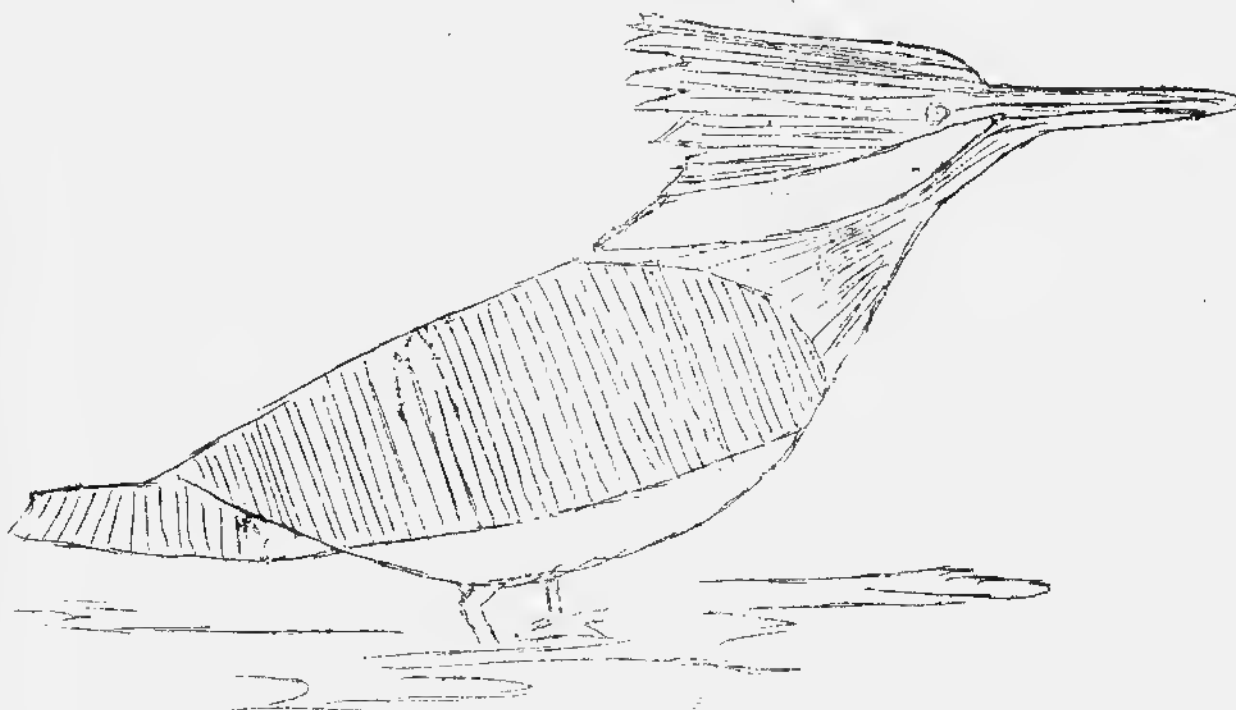
It can thus be affirmed that they are found as low as 900 ft.

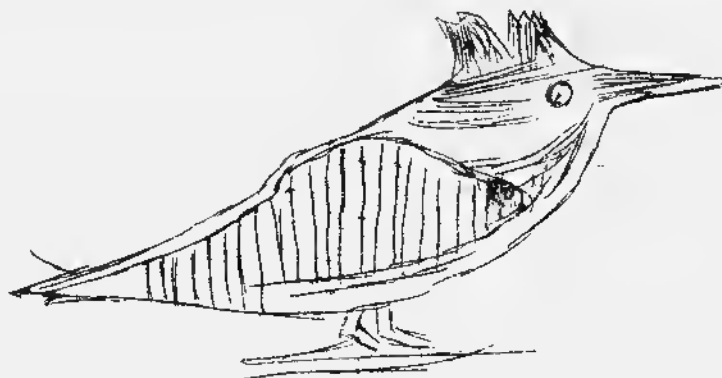
They nest, like other kingfishers, in holes on the river bank. They have been observed emerging from nest holes in March at Khulal where the Jumna passes through the Siwaliks.

There is one point which needs to be established. Are they resident in these areas and at these low altitudes or are they merely down for the colder months? Other river bank dwellers like the white capped redstart and plumbeous redstart come down from November to April and as our observations have not covered the summer months it is possible that the Himalayan Kingfisher has similar habits.

The fact, however, that they do nest in the area tends one to believe that they are resident throughout the year.

Could any reader kindly throw more light on the subject?





Ceryle lugubris

Himalayan Pied Kingfishers.

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# CORRESPONDENCE

Brown Shrike - *Leanius cristatus cristatus* LINNAEUS:

Dr. Salim Ali in his Book "The Birds of Travancore and Cochin" has recorded, as the last date the bird was seen before its departure to its breeding ground, as 27th April. I have been keeping a close watch over this bird for the last three years, but could not succeed in seeing the bird after 27th April. Sri K.K. Neelakantan in "Birds of Kerala (Malayalam)" has stated that a few birds can be seen even in May. Mr. G.H. Henry in his "A Guide to the birds of Ceylon" also states that the bird leaves to its breeding ground in April-May. Therefore there is every possibility of some birds being with us even after 27th April. I would like to have information from the readers on the last date the bird was seen in Kerala before its departure to its breeding ground.

K.N. Nair  
Kerala.

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In Dr. Salim Ali's book "Indian Hill Birds", it is stated that the Nilgiri Wood Pigeon occurs as far north as Mahabaleshwar. However, I have seen these Wood pigeons here from about the 20th of September in varying numbers. Do these birds often wander north during the monsoon? They often feed close to the ground on lantana and other bushes.

Many birds flock to our garden in search of ripe figs. A Common Grey Hornbill is a regular visitor. But it is often accompanied by two other hornbills of the same size and colour and with a similar voice. But they just have a small knob on the bill where the casque ought to be. Are these Malabar Grey Hornbills or young Common Grey Hornbills?

Today morning I saw a kite which appeared rather different from the Pariah Kite. It was soaring in company with two Pariah Kites, so the differences were quite clear. It appeared slightly longer and had a curious pole head. The upper surface of the tail appeared bright chestnut when the bird banked in flight. The tail also appeared more deeply forked. Its flight was similar to the Pariah Kites. I think it was the Common Kite (*Milvus milvus*). Please let me know if my identification was correct and whether it has been recorded from Poona before.

Mr. N.M. Mistry writes to say that 'the Victoria Gardens Zoo is sorry state' and requires a lot of improvement, particularly in birds' section. Name plates at the cages are inaccurate and incomplete, and an information board at the entrance gives misleading information about several species. Mr. Mistry adds, 'Our Municipal authorities spend large sums of money on acquiring rare birds and animals (from other countries). Why then, can a small sum not be spent on acquiring interesting Indian birds, which are sadly absent in the Zoo?'.  
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I have to apologize for two errors in my Bharatpur article in the last issue. The Mir Shikaris generally use a kind of hemp torch, not 'lanterns'. And the sketch of the Pied Bush Chat should not have had a crooked tail. Alternatively, readers may interpret it as an Indian Robin with a wrong label.

Shama Futehally.

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Zafar Futehally  
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers  
32-A, Juhu Lane,  
Andheri, Bombay 58-AS.